REPRESENTING THE NATION: COMPETING SYMBOLIC REPERTOIRES IN INDIA

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Abstract

In order to fully understand and appreciate India's contested national identity, one must look at the emergence and evolution of India's national symbolic repertoires. Indeed, political symbols are necessary elements for the defining national identities. Besides facilitating the process of identification, national symbols also generate powerful visions of the nation. Significantly, at the heart of the battle for the definition of the nation there is often a struggle over symbols and myths, which is fought, in good part, through rituals. Indeed, the more problematic the definition of nationhood, the greater the need to create symbolic structures which may substantiate and support a particular idea of the nation. Throughout the contemporary history of India, competing nationalist ideologies have engaged in a search for appropriate symbolic repertoires that could be meaningful and acceptable to most of the Indian population. In the absence of familiar parameters of national identity such as ethnicity, language, religion and culture, unusual registers of national belonging became important markers of India's contested national identity during the colonial and post-colonial period.

Given the importance of symbolic politics, it is surprising that so little attention has been devoted to a systematic study of the symbolic repertoires of India's competing nationalist ideologies. Therefore, this thesis intends to make a contribution in this field. The main aims of this study were to obtain a general picture of the evolution and establishment of symbols of nationhood in India. I have drawn on modernist and constructivist theories of nationalism and based on the identification and analysis of India's symbols of the nation and of national identity during its anti-colonial struggle, the Nehruvian era, and in the contemporary moment, and on an in-depth review of the existing literature. While bringing to the fore the complex relationship between the nation and pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources, the findings of this study help to shed light on the operational dynamics at play in the construction of nationalist symbol complexes and national identity in India.

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Glossary

Acharya	Spiritual teacher
Adivasi	Tribal
Ahimsa	Non-violence.
Akhand Bharat	Undivided India
Alha	Ballads in traditional metre.
Ashram	Hermitage
Aryavarta	The traditional land of the Vedic Aryans.
Avatara	Incarnation of a deity, especially of Vishnu
Babri Masjid	Mosque built in 1528 in honour of the Moghul emperor Babur in Ayodhya apparently on a pre-existing Hindu temple that marked the birth place of the god Ram. It was destroyed by a Hindu mob on 6 December 1992.
Bajrang Dal	The youth organisation of the VHP.
Bhagawa Dhwaj	Saffron Flag
Bhajan	Devotional Hindu song
Bhakti	Devotion; ecstatic love. The terms also refers to a particular approach to Hinduism that stresses personal devotion rather than orthodox ritual.
Bharat	Sanskrit term for India.
Bharat Mata	Mother India, and by extension the motherland.
Bharat Varsha	The land of Bharat, another name for India.
Bharatiya	Indian.
Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]	Indian People's Party. Political party born out of the ashes of the earlier Bharatiya Janata Sangh in 1980. Part of the Sangh Parivar.
Bharatiya Janata Sangh [BJS]	Indian People's Organisation. Also known simply as Jana Sangh [JS]. Founded by Dr

	Shyama Prasad Mookerjee in 1951. In 1980 it was succeeded by the BJP.
Brahmin	The priestly caste
Bunds	A form of non-cooperation and resistance to authority particularly widespread in Maharashtra.
Chakra	Wheel.
Chakravartin	Appellation designating the all-conquering monarch 'whose wheels are rolling everywhere without obstruction'.
Charkha	Spinning wheel. It became a symbol of the anti-colonial movement.
Crore	Also spelled: Krore. Indian unit of measure equivalent to ten million.
Dalit	Literally 'oppressed'. Those at the bottom or outside the Indian caste system – the 'untouchables'.
Darshan	Literally: 'seeing'. In practice, central act of Hindu worship centred on the gaze exchanged between the worshipper and the deity.
Devanagari	Alphabet used for Sanskrit, Hindi and other Indian languages.
Dhams	In Hinduism, where the divine is said to reside; they are placed at the four cardinal points at Badrinath, Puri, Rameshvaram, and Dvaraka.
Dharma	Ethical code; duty; religious practice.
Dharna	Spelled also *dhurna*. Traditional form of non-cooperation that consisted in sitting – as a sign of protest – in front of the door or house of another person who was allegedly accused of wrongdoing.

Ekatmata	Literally: 'make into one', 'unification'. Guiding principle of VHP mobilisation campaigns to unify the Hindu community.
Gau Swamis	Itinerant preachers of the Cow Protection Movement.
Gaurakshini Sabhas	Associations for the Protection of the Cow
Guru	Spiritual leader; teacher.
Hanuman	Monkey-warrior in the *Ramayana*; loyal ally of Ram.
Hindu Rashtra	Hindu nation-state
Hindutva	Literally: 'Hinduness'. Term coined by V D Savarkar. Nationalist ideology whose final aim is the creation of a Hindu nation-state.
Jati	Sub-caste
Karseva	Manual work in service of a religious cause; originally from Sikhism.
Khadi	Hand-woven and hand-spun cloth.
Kirtans	Hymns.
Kisan	Farmer
Koor	Practice of self-immolation.
Kshatriya	The warrior caste.
Lok Sabha	Lower House of the Indian Parliament.
Mahabharata	One of India's great epic poems.
Mahatma	Great soul.
Mandir	Temple.
Masjid	Mosque.
Matribhū	Motherland.
Namaz	Prayers.
Non-resident Indian [NRI]	Person resident outside India who is either a citizen of India or a person of Indian origin.
Om	Hindu sacred syllable.

Parikrama	In Hinduism, ritual circumambulation.
Patias	Chain letters written generally in vernacular. Their main purpose was to incite mobilisation and frequently the recipient of the letter had to copy and send several other copies to other villages. The British called it village telegraph
Person of Indian Origin [PIO]	An individual who at any time held an Indian passport or whose parents and grandparents were citizens of India by virtue of the Constitution of India or the Citizenship Act 1955.
Phag	Typical *Holi* songs.
Pitrbhū	Fatherland.
Pooja	Prayers.
Punyabhū	Holyland.
Rajya	Government, nation, state.
Ramayana	Major Hindu epic poem telling the story of the king Ram incarnation of Vishnu.
Ramjanmabhoomi	Ram's birthplace. It refers to the movement launched by the VHP for the liberation of the Hindu temple that once marked Ram's birthplace.
Ramlila	Festival dramatising the life of Rama.
Ramrajya	Literally: 'rule of Ram'. Mythological kingdom of the god Ram; by extension it also indicates the utopian Hindu nation-state
Ram Shila Pujan	(also spelled: *Shilan Pujan*). Ceremonial consecration of bricks intended for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.
Rasa	Mood
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	

[RSS]	National Indian Volunteer Association. Central organisation of the Sangh Parivar founded by Keshava Baliram Hedgewar in 1925.
Rashtriya	National
Rath Yatra	Chariot pilgrimage, march.
Sadhu	Hindu ascetic.
Shakha	RSS training branch.
Shakti	The primordial energy without which the universe could not have been created and it is conceptualised as a female being.
Samaj	Society.
Sanatana Dharma	Literally: 'eternal religion'. Orthodox Hinduism. Used especially in opposition to the socio-religious reform movements of the nineteenth century.
Sangh Parivar	The 'family of organisations' with means of proselytisation and spearhead of militant Hindu revivalism.
Satyagraha	Literally: 'truth-force'. Method of mass mobilisation devised by Gandhi during the anti-colonial movement. Also meaning passive resistance and disobedience to the law.
Shila	Foundation stone; brick.
Shilanyas	Ceremony for laying of foundation.
Sloka	Verse
Sudarshan Chakra	Vishnu's discus weapon.
Swadeshi	Literally: 'of one's own country'; indigenous. During the nationalist movement it indicated the boycott of foreign goods, especially cloth, in favour of Indian manufactures. More recently,

	the term is used to indicate an ideology of self-reliance.
Swaraj	Self-rule; independence.
Swayamsevak	A volunteer, an activist of the RSS.
Tapas	Self-suffering or penance.
Tilak	Auspicious mark on the forehead.
Tiranga	The tricolour: India's national flag.
Traga	Practices of self-immolation.
Trthas	Crossing places, where the gods have 'crossed down' into this world as *avataras*.
Tyag	Renunciation.
Updesh	Sermon
Utsava	Religious festival.
Vedas	The four sacred Sanskrit books that are at the basis of Hindu traditions.
Videshi	Foreigner, of another country.
Virat Purusha	Primeval man.
Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP]	World Hindu Council. Cultural, missionary and religious arm of the RSS funded in 1964.
Yajna	Sacrifice especially fire sacrifice; oblation.
Yatra	Pilgrimage; march.

"The State is invisible; it must be personified before
it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved,
imagined before it can be conceived"
[Walzer 1967:194]

CHAPTER 1
Symbolising the Nation

In the late evening of 14 August 1947 at 10:45 p.m. Central Hall of Parliament House was packed to its capacity. The new national flag hung in the Chamber against the wall panels that had formerly held portraits of British viceroys. At 11 p.m. the notes of *Vande Mataram* reverberated in the Central Hall as Suchita Kripalani – wife of Congress president Acharya Kripalani – opened the House proceedings by singing India's dearest patriotic song. A brief opening address by the Constituent Assembly Chairman – Dr Rajendra Prasad – was followed by two minutes of silence in memory of those who died in the struggle for freedom. Nehru then delivered his famous speech, 'Tryst with Destiny'. When midnight approached, in keeping with indigenous traditions, conch shells were blown to mark this auspicious event. The people assembled rose to their feed to make their pledge to dedicate themselves to the service of India and her people. Parliament House resonated with shouts of *Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jay* and *Vande Mataram*. At the sound of bugles, Lord Mountbatten, resplendent in his white uniform, was sworn in as India's first Constitutional Governor General. Mrs Hansa Metha then presented Rajendra Prasad the new Indian national flag while Mrs Kripalani closed the proceedings singing *Sare Jahan se Accha Hindustan Hamara* and *Jana Gana Mana*. This special Constituent Assembly meeting culminated with the breaking of the new national flag over the assembly building. In and outside the Chamber jubilant crowds celebrated this momentous event. For two days and two nights India witnessed scenes of unprecedented enthusiasm. In Delhi on 15 August after the swearing by Mountbatten – now Governor General – of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, the ceremony of the salutation of the new national flag took place in Princes' Park. Mountbatten proceeded form Durbar Hall to Princes' Park in a ceremonial carriage accompanied by horse guards and a fanfare of trumpets. An ecstatic and supportive crowd had gathered along Kingsway and cheered Mountbatten with shouts *Jay Hind* and *Pandit Nehru Ki Jay* and *Mahatma Gandhi ki Jay*. The crowd was so

immense at Princes' Park that Mountbatten and Nehru had to do without their carefully planned ceremony and hastily hoisted the national flag. At that point, a rainbow appeared in the sky. This memorable day ended with a state banquet at Government House hosted by the Mountbattens while Delhi crowds celebrated the event dancing in the streets. The next day – 16 August – at 8.30 in the morning Jawaharlal Nehru addressed the crowd from the rampart of the Red Fort of Old Delhi and unfurled the national flag, under an impressive flypast of the Indian Air Forces. Flag salutations and military parades, as well as torchlight processions, marches and *Prabhat Pheris,* caste dinners, and distribution of sweets and food marked the day around the country, in state capitals and district headquarters alike.

The ceremonies that accompanied the transfer of power on 15 August 1947 paid symbolic homage to the nationalist movement, its martyrs and to the ideals and values it enshrined. Rituals such as these articulate the values and ideals of nationhood, they legitimate power and symbolise a sense of belonging. Besides providing symbolic representations of the nation this particular rite promotes a feeling of solidarity by symbolically exalting the bond of the nation. In fact, mass demonstrations of this kind usually have a strong emotional impact on the participants, increasing their identification with the group. By creating the opportunity for a large crowd to gather and by showing the crowds the great symbols of the nation (the flag, the national emblem, the national anthem, the army, and the people), these ceremonies boost and strengthen nationalist sentiments, while legitimating the political status quo.

While political analysts acknowledge these rituals' political role, they tend to ignore them; however, since political processes are primarily communication exchanges, rituals that spark communication and stir emotions are important in political discussions. We would contend that "power is embedded in linguistic practices" [Shapiro 1984:15], and stress that one of the essential features of all forms of political power is the need for representation and communication. The communication structure usually employed by political power (whatever its nature) is a combination of discursive and symbolic registers. In other words, political language in both its

discursive (hence verbal) and symbolic (non-verbal and visual) forms is an important instrument and factor of power.

These traits are common to both conservative forms of power and to radical or revolutionary political movements. Modern nationalisms, however, require strong symbolic constructions. These movements favour iconic and symbolic language over a purely verbal one. Admittedly, beyond bringing the nation into existence, one of nationalism's aims is to define the nation to rally support and encourage mass participation for the establishment of a nation thus conceived. Given the nation's abstract character, however, nationalist movements necessarily demand articulate systems of symbolic representations that define and transmit the nation's values and heighten emotional responses. This demand arises for two reasons. First, nationalisms need to communicate complex abstract concepts. Concepts such as those of the nation or of a people, which are crucial to any nationalist ideology, are to a certain extent arbitrary and, although not entirely artificial, are still objects of the imagination and difficult to articulate. Nationalist language must therefore be evocative in both its discursive and symbolic registers. Nationalisms build complex narratives of the nation using a very evocative and highly metaphorical language that finds expression in elaborate systems of public ceremonies, rites, festivals, national myths and symbols. With their suggestive, imaginative and creative language, nationalisms transform nations' elusive and abstract ideas into tangible realities while generating powerful national visions. Secondly, nationalist movements, as expected, resort to the use of a symbolic language to draw support for the nationalist cause and mobilise the masses. Historically, the emergence of nationalisms is linked to the growth of modern mass politics [Mosse 1975] and indeed, the "ultimate force of symbols depends on their power to stir the emotions moving men into action and reaction" [Lewis 1977:2]. Nationalisms employ the evocative and inspirational language of symbols to unite people, to rally support and to encourage participation. Mass participation is essential to the creation of a national identity too. In addition, the choice of symbolic language over a terse verbal one is not simply dictated by the intrinsic evocative and emotionally charged character of symbols, but also by a pragmatic necessity: to communicate to a

largely illiterate and semi-educated population. Ultimately, nationalism's intrinsic characteristics necessitate a language whose highly evocative symbolic constructions and system of representations are able to support the imagery of the nation.

Such an argument suggests that the political world is in large part symbolically constructed. Politics and political processes, however, purport to be scientific and rational, based on objective circumstances and reason. In general, people believe that their political orientation is the result of rational and logical evaluations that attempt to get at the *real* heart of the matter. We express our views and preferences by voting for the party that best represents our political convictions. Although Machiavelli had long ago observed that "men in general make judgements more by appearances that by reality, for sight alone belongs to anyone but understanding to few" [quoted in Muir 1981:74-75], we tend to perceive politics and political dynamics as logical and rational actions. Elder and Cobb [1983:2] argue that symbolic processes are neither rational nor irrational, but are instead *a*-rational. Political action is not the result of a stable set of personal interests, logical action and extensive information; nor are people reacting blindly according to unconscious emotional impulses and prejudices that defy logic. To establish how emotions generated by rituals and symbols influence the cognitive message remains an open question; however, Elder and Cobb [1983] contend that rites and symbols create an emotional state that makes the political message incontestable, because it has been constructed to appear inherently natural and emotionally compelling beyond any rational discussion.

According to the anthropologist Emile Durkheim who studied Australian aborigines, rituals – understood as a standardised and repetitive symbolic behaviour – play a crucial role in creating and maintaining a feeling of solidarity among the members of society. However, this is not just typical of primitive societies. Even those systems with highly developed organic solidarity[1] need a common set of symbolic

[1] Durkheim distinguishes between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is typical of those society where individual difference are minimised and "collective consciousness completely envelops our whole conscience" [Durkheim 1956:129]. Organic

representations and collective symbols of integration. Just like Durkheim's Australian aborigines, modern nations – irrespective of their degree of complexity – engage in ritual activities to advance their image of common identity through symbolic representations of the group: the national flag, the army, the anthem, are all symbols that conjure up the image of the nation and ideas of national identity. Indeed, according to Abner Cohen [1969; 1974] one of the most important functions of symbols is their ability to objectify relations between individuals and groups and therefore to reify questions of identity. Thus, examining symbolic forms of nationhood contributes to our understanding of how nations define their identity and articulate their claims to power.

In India the concept of nation and nationhood is problematic. As Kertzer [1988:179] puts it, the more problematic the definition of nationhood, the greater the need to create symbolic structures (in the form of rituals for instance) that can politically sustain or even destroy a particular concept of nationhood. At the heart of the battle for the definition of the idea of India there is a struggle over symbols and myths, which is fought, in good part, through ritual. For the British that ruled in India in the XIX and XX centuries, India was simply a geographical expression that marked not "the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and languages" [Seeley 1931:256]. This categorical denial on the part of the British in acknowledging the existence of an Indian national identity has had long-lasting repercussions on the development of Indian nationalism. Indeed the definition of what constitute Indian identity has preoccupied India not only during the anti-colonial movement but also in the post-colonial period. I would contend then that the history of independent India is characterised by the protraction of the process of nation-making[2].

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solidarity, on the contrary, emerges out of difference rather than likeness between individuals and it is a product of the division of labour.

[2] The term nation-making refers both to practices of nation *building* (a term used predominantly in the 1950s and 1960s to refer mainly to those practices employed by those newly independent countries emerging from the colonial empires and which stressed practices of nationalisation of state structures and institutions) and to the "pragmatics of identity formation" [Foster 1997:3], or in other words, to practices of creation and dissemination of a sense of national identity.

Indian nationalists initially identified nationalism as the source of the European nations' power. This realisation however caused anxiety as it begged the question: can India be a modern nation following a European style nationalism that identifies not just territorial and political unity but also cultural traits – linguistic, religious and of traditions – as essential features to the nation? This anxiety spurred a debate between two distinct visions of Indian nationalism: one pushed for a replica of the European model and for larger homogeneity, while the other argued for a multilayered nationalism that acknowledged regional, cultural and religious diversity. Over time the latter was adopted as the official form of nationalism of independent India. Such a multilayered nationalism, however, needed to promote a viable national symbolic repertoire. In the absence of familiar parameters of national identity such as ethnicity, language, religion and culture, unusual registers of national belonging became important markers of India's contested national identity during the colonial and post-colonial period.

In the light of contemporary theories of nationalism, this thesis considers how nations are social constructs and how symbols participate in this process of construction; it analyses the sets of meanings and values that have been used in making claims about national identity in India. In particular it looks at changes and continuities, similarities and differences in symbolic repertoires used to express notions of nationhood, thus analysing the role of symbols and symbolic practices in the construction of the nation and of national identity. Since the emergence of the nationalist movement, the imagined Indian nation and its associated symbolic repertoires have changed considerably over the years. Contesting symbolic repertoires have emerged. Though some symbols have remained intact – because only revolutions are capable of radically changing the symbolic repertoires [Kertzer 1988] – these have assumed new meanings. This change has not only interested the symbols cognitive content but also their affective dimension. This thesis will examine how national identity developed in India and why the nation came to mean what it did. All forms of nationalism must address the issue of what it means to belong to a nation as well as who does and who does not belong. It will also explore and address questions of how

ideas about nationality change over time by focussing on those who have dominated India's symbolic activity.

My objective is to identify the symbolic repertoires of three crucial periods in the life of the Indian nation: the anti-colonial movement, the Nehruvian post-colonial period, and the years of Hindutva's politics. Moreover, I assess the contribution of the symbolic repertoires to nationalist movements and consider the role of political, economic, and social contexts in this constructive process. By looking at the nationalist symbolic repertoires, this thesis answers the questions: what is India? How is India perceived: as a territory, culture, or a people? Is it represented as a homogeneous or a multicultural entity? How is the nation visualised? How is national identity symbolically defined? How is the nation's position in the international community symbolically represented? This assessment of the ideological and the material constraints of nationalism during the three periods under consideration is based on the analysis of the political actors and symbol wielders, archival research, participant observation and a study of national rituals and cultural practices, critical reading of visual texts and an examination of official documents.

Political symbolism

National narratives conjure up the image of the nation and ideas of national identities and are enacted publicly in various forms and official procedures [Cohn and Dirks 1988:224]. Political actions that range from official discourse to other self-conscious state-controlled practices for the production and dissemination of national consciousness and sentiment of national identity [Foster 1997:3] – poems, literature, advertisements, logos, letters to the editor, monuments, architecture, currency, communication policies, legislations (e.g., the preamble of the constitution), arts programmes, schooling and education policies, public ceremonies and rites of integration and mobilisation – are all symbolic formations. Symbolic forms can stand for "a wide range of meanings, agitate emotions, [and] spur men into action" [Cohen 1974:ix]. The symbols we study are symbols of nationalism and national identity. They are symbols of politics, of political ceremony and ritual, and of law and social control [Gusfielf and Michalowicz 1984].

Nations cannot be seen or touched if not in their symbolic representations. Flags, maps, currency, stamps, monuments, ceremonies and rituals help us grasp and imagine Great Britain or India. Indeed, through representations we are able to perceive nationalities and be political [Kertzer 1988]. These items are not symbols simply because they stand for the nation (say the Union Jack for Great Britain or the *Tiranga* for India) but also because they are able to represent, trigger, and transmit a whole host of other associations that are more difficult to represent. These associations refer to the basic values and ideals that are embedded in the notion of nationhood of a particular nation.

What is a Symbol?

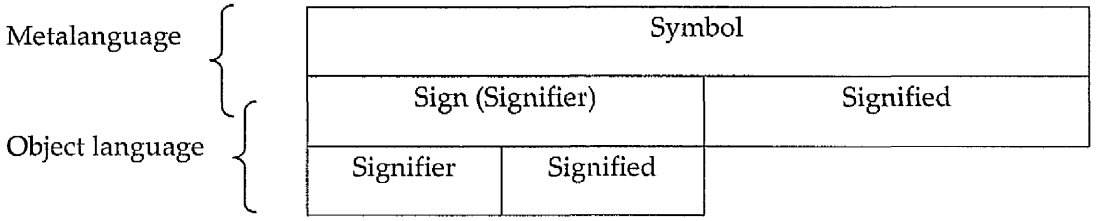
To understand political symbols requires a description of the general notion of symbol. The Oxford English Dictionary defines symbols as

> "Something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental of conventional relation); esp. a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token".

Symbols are objects that represent abstract ideas or concepts and belong to the category of sign. According to the linguistic Ferdinand de Saussure the sign results from the association of the signifier with the signified (include note 3 in text). This relationship (signification) between the form the sign takes (signifier) and the concept it represents (signified) is typically arbitrary as there is no intrinsic or inevitable relationship between the two [Saussure 1974]. Unlike icons, symbols are arbitrary in their relation to what they refer to. They neither resemble it, nor are they causally connected to it.

Dittmer (1977) argues that it is the distinctive metalinguistic property of symbols that distinguishes political symbolism from other political language on the basis of its linguistic properties. The metalinguistic property of symbols refers to the symbols' ability of functioning both as 'object language' – thus denoting a specific

empirical event or object – and as 'metalanguage, referring to a series of signs [Dittmer 1977:567]. This relationship can be expressed by the following diagram[3]:



According to the above diagram, the possible meanings of a symbol are given by the initial, literal, simpler and more obvious meaning of the object language. Let's consider as an example the word Kargil in contemporary India. Kargil is a toponym referring on a denotative level to a district located on the Himalayan mountain range in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. On a first connotative level, however, Kargil refers to a war India and Pakistan fought during the summer of 1999. Still on a further symbolic level, the word Kargil stands for military prowess, patriotism and ultimately for Indianness.

Thus, a symbol may "integrate an indefinite series of signs into a meaningful synthesis while retaining the illusion of concrete reality peculiar to words in everyday language". [Dittmer 1977:567-8]. Symbols are therefore *second-order semiological systems* [Barthes 1993:114] where what is a sign in the first system becomes the signifier of the second system. Because of this, symbols are effective, economical and synthetic instruments of communication. They can condense an array of information into a single linguistic form for immediacy of communication. Ultimately, it is thanks to the metalinguistic property of symbols that the word Kargil is a toponym, a historical event (the 1999 conflict between India and Pakistan), and a sentiment (patriotism).

Symbols of Politics

In the realm of politics, symbols serve to represent the political reality. Elder and Cobb described political symbols as

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[3] This diagram is adapted from both Barthes [1993] and Dittmer [1977].

> "those perceived significant within a population and that characterize the politics of that population. [ ] The objects of significant symbolization include the major structure and processes of a political system, as well as major historical events in the life of the polity". [Elder and Cobb 1983:143]

As for purely linguistic symbols, political symbols are key elements in the process of political communication [Elder and Cobb 1983:3]. A primary characteristic of symbols is the representation of abstract entities, the ability to draw attention to things absent, and the simplification of objects representing values. Because of their evocative power, political symbols are effective means to express ideology and to champion notions about national identity [Spillman 1997]. Through the employment of symbols nationalist movements are able to formulate articulate images of the nation.

A brief look at the Indian national flag illustrates the role of political symbols as expression of the political reality and as key elements in the process of political communication. The flag is as plain a statement as possible about sovereignty and national identity; it provides a powerful symbolism for the political community heralding a particular worldview. It is also the strongest symbol of patriotism. As an element of communication, the flag represents the nation and its state in public ceremonies, sports contest and competitions and it is often displayed in times of trouble as well as on holidays and other patriotic occasions. Flags have proved particularly useful symbols of communication because they are cheap and easily made. Lots of people can carry them and lots of people can see them. They can also be emotionally charged: besides indexing the nation-state, flags trigger patriotic sentiments and a sense of belonging. In many countries, desecration, dishonouring and destruction of the national flag thus become offence punishable with a prison sentence, a fine and sometimes both[4].

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[4] In India, Section 2 of the *Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act of 1971* provides for a maximum jail term of three years and a fine:
Insults to Indian National Flag and Constitution of India. Whoever in any public place or in any other place within public view burns, mutilates, defaces, defiles disfigures, destroys, tramples upon or otherwise brings into contempt (whether by words, either spoken or written, or by acts) the Indian National Flag or the Constitution of India or any part thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend, to three years, or with fine, or with

The Indian national flag is a tricolour with three broad horizontal colour bands: saffron, white and green. In the centre of the white band there is a wheel derived from the one that appears on the Sarnath Lion Capital erected by Asoka, the great Mauryan king who ruled in India during the third century B.C. and converted to non-violence. Because national symbols are, of course, an integral part of a state official ideology, the Indian flag, besides representing the country, also transmits images of some of the most important concepts of Indian nationalism. The *Tiranga* not only symbolically represents a sense of indigenousness – *swadeshi* – but, most importantly, it also pictorially proclaims the country's final independence from Britain. These two concepts of indigenousness and independence are translated iconographically through the particular format and design.

In the Indian flag, which avoids contentious religious symbolism, indigenousness is represented by both the choice of colours and the inclusion in the design of the Asokan wheel. While the colours saffron, white, and green denote respectively "courage and sacrifice, ( ) peace and truth, [and] faith and chivalry" [5], according to India's cultural traditions[6], the wheel is thought to be a symbol of India ancient culture[7], at the same time avoiding contentious religious symbols. Moreover, in

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both.[http://www.indialawinfo.com/bareacts/nathon.html. See also the *Flag Code* which incorporates this Act at: http://www.outlookindia.com/specialfeaturem.asp? fodname=2000125 &fname=flagcode&sid=1].

[5] *Times of India*, August 6, 1931, p.10

[6] The design of the Indian flag drew inspiration from previous flags used by the Indian National Congress during the nationalist movement, with only few modifications for what concerns the symbols inscribed in the flag and the order of the colour bands. Significantly, earlier flags meant to symbolise values that differ from the ones heralded nowadays. [See Chapter 2]

[7] Asoka was the great Mauryan ruler, known for his religious tolerance, his *ahimsa* (non-violence) and his conversion to Buddhism. Although Asoka was known by the epithet of *chakravartin*, an appellation of the emperor referring to an all-conquering monarch "whose wheels are rolling everywhere without obstruction" – the wheel then symbolising the ruling power – the Asokan period was also an era when ambassadors went to far off countries to bring messages of peace, culture and goodwill. Accordingly a further connotation of the use of the Asokan emblem on the Indian national flag was to signify that India is a country whose main goal is the promotion of peace and harmony on the international arena. This connotation was supported by Nehru's endorsement of a foreign policy of non-alignment. According to this

the post-independence period, the Asokan wheel signified the nationalist movement from its inception to the *swadeshi* movement. As a spinning wheel, it symbolised when the power looms of the British Empire crushed the indigenous artisan economy and reduced India to economic slavery. The cloth it spun became the Indian nationalists' uniform and a symbol of both self-reliance and defiance.

While the colour code and the Asokan wheel stand for indigenouness, it is the formal design of the flag that symbolise the concept of independence. Contrary to other British ex-colonies (e.g., Australia and New Zealand), India did not adopt the colour iconography of the Union Jack – red, white and blue – nor its peculiar crossed pattern. Rather, it adopted the tricoloured pattern to symbolise the end of domination and the fact that the cultural traditions of India as an independent nation did not derive from the British colonial heritage. Moreover, besides connoting independence, the choice of the tricolour also prompted an immediate connection with the liberal tradition of the French revolution. The tricolour was not an indigenous symbol. It was evidently part of the European tradition of nationalism. The adoption of the design of three vertical stripes was an unmistakeable gesture towards cosmopolitanism.

Thus, the Indian national flag does not simply stand for India; on the contrary, its iconography is rather complex and symbolises the ideals of the newly independent India. The symbolical meaning of the flag was not lost on Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. On presenting the flag to the Constituent Assembly in 1947, he recognised that the flag was not simply identifying a new geo-political entity, but that it was also telling with its iconography and choices of colours the story of the making of India. It symbolically celebrated the new nation, its achievements, while in the same breath it heralded the future:

> "So, (...) there is much more than will be clear on the surface. There is the struggle of the people for freedom, with all its ups and downs and trials and disasters, and there is, finally today as I move this Resolutions, a certain

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reading, the Indian flag is not a flag of empire and domination but a flag connoting peaceful dynamism [Singh n.d.:90].

triumph about it - a measure of triumph in the conclusion of that struggle" [Nehru, 1947:5].

Therefore, national symbols are not only crucial to *visualising* the nation, but are also vital to representing the nation. Indeed, "[P]olitical symbols bring out in concentrated form those particular meanings and emotions" [Edelman 1964:11] that disclose the political culture's values and assumptions. In the case of India, the *tiranga* represents indigenousness, independence, sovereignty and internationalism.

On the Quality of Political Symbols

Elder and Cobb [1983] distinguish between higher order symbols and lower order ones (alternatively called situational symbols). The former are usually associated with a country's political regime or its political community; the latter usually relate to current authorities, non-governmental political actors, policies and issues. The two authors suggest that higher order symbols tend to be more inclusive, more durable, and have a stronger affective attachment than those situational symbols that are related to current policies and political actors and that, therefore, tend to be more transient and exclusive. This thesis examines both types of symbols because the distinction is useful when analysing Hindu nationalist symbolic repertoires in that it throws light onto their relentless strategy to conflate the two types of symbols and convert situational symbols into high order ones.

Symbols of nationalism are not simply illustrations of political power and political culture; rather they are the expressions of national identity. As such they can be what Cohen [1974] calls symbols of distinctiveness: symbols that aim at stressing the group's uniqueness and exclusiveness. These symbols aim at fostering national (internal) integration. According to Cohen [1969] symbolic affirmations of identity can be articulated by the use of symbols of kinship that can express issues of relation and in particular of power relations; by the employment of symbols of distinctiveness (such as myths of common descent, marriage customs, moral exclusiveness, ritual practice and life style) that define the group identity as exclusive; and by the enactment of symbolic actions such as rituals (not necessarily religious, but also secular) that represent in

symbolic form the ways in which groups and individuals interact with other groups and individuals.

These symbols of distinctiveness usually find representations in what Merriam [1934], in opposition to *credenda*, calls *miranda* of power. For Merriam, *miranda* – or things to be admired – include all the symbolic apparatus of a government, such as:

> "memorial days and periods, public places and monumental apparatus, music and songs, artistic designs, in flags, decorations, statuary, uniforms, story and history, ceremonials of an elaborate nature, mass demonstrations, with parades, oratory, music." [Merriam 1934: 105].

Credenda – or things to be believed:

> "contain the reasons which oblige the intellect to give assent to the continuance of authority. And this assent may be due to government in general, or to particular holders of power, or to the special system of authority in vogue at any given moment in a particular unit of power or to a special system of authority in vogue at any given moment in a particular unit of power" [Merriam 1934:113].

Credenda are therefore, justifying beliefs, or otherwise symbolisations and articulations of the reasons to believe in the legitimate power. They are legitimating factors, which reduce the coercive use of power. The *miranda* – or things to be admired – are those symbols of the political myth capable of both inciting people's emotions and fostering feelings of identification and of solidarity with others. In Lasswell's words, *miranda* are those elements of the political myth "whose function is to arouse admiration and enthusiasm, setting forth and strengthening faiths and loyalties" [Lasswell 1949:11]. In particular, *miranda,*

> "not only arouse emotions indulgent to the social structure, but also heighten awareness of the sharing of these emotions by others, thereby promoting mutual identification and providing a basis of solidarity" [*Ibid*].

While *credenda* work on the mind, *miranda* have an effect on emotions [Merriam 1934]. In particular, the *miranda* of power give form to contents of *credenda,* including all the aesthetic aspects of politics.

On the Meaning of Symbols

Symbols are by definition ambiguous and polysemic. Despite meanings always deriving and depending in some way on the original signification of what Dittmer [1977] and Barthes [1993] call the object-language of the symbol, in symbolic representations there is an absence of any natural connection between the symbols and the symbolised – what they stand for. In a way, the relationship between the signified and the significant is not arbitrary but culturally determined and conventional. Indeed, symbols do not exist in nature but are born out of conventions resting on parameters of human communications. As Firth [1973:56] observed "[C]riteria selected for classification of symbols may come from the natural worlds, but 'symbol' is a cultural not natural category".

Nevertheless, symbols are not totally arbitrary. There is "a formal analogy in logical structure between a symbol and its referent" [Edelman 1964:132]. Therefore, symbols' meaning can be motivated by an analogical-intuitive link. This is particularly true of visual symbols, which therefore become the privileged tools to represent abstract ideas. The difficulties related to arguing a symbol's meaning, however, are further complicated by the symbol's fundamental characteristics, which are:

1. Condensation. Turner [1970:50] described the condensation quality of symbols as the interaction and synthesis of different meanings for the creation of new complex meanings. The eminent linguist Edward Sapir had already introduced this concept when he distinguished between condensational symbols, which summarise and condense experiences, feelings, and beliefs in an ongoing process of social interaction and communication, and referential, purely denotative symbols[8].

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[8] Sapir in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Science* [1934:493] gives the following definition:

> "[Symbol] expresses a condensation of energy, its actual significance being out of all proportion to the apparent triviality of meaning suggested by its mere form [ ] It seems useful to distinguish two main types of symbolism. The first of these, which may be called referential symbolism, embraces such claims as oral speech, writing, the telegraph code, national flags, flag signalling, and other organizations of symbols, which are agreed upon as economical devices for purpose of reference. The second type of symbolism is equally economical and may be termed condensational symbolism, for it is a highly condensed form of substitute behavior for direct expression, allowing for the ready release of emotional tension in conscious or unconscious form."

2. Polysemy. This second characteristic of symbolic meaning is clearly linked with the symbols' condensation quality. But if condensation stresses the composite nature of symbolic meaning, polysemy gives emphasis to the symbols' ability to stand for different things, to its flexibility and adaptability. Turner [1967:50] also defined polysemy: it stands for the capacity of symbol to be understood and interpreted in different ways by different people[9].
3. Ambiguity. Related both to condensation and polysemy, ambiguity points to the fact that symbols do not have a single and distinct meaning. It is ultimately this characteristic that makes symbols so useful in human society and which is at the basis of symbols' strength[10].

Because the scope of political communication in modern mass politics is to create and mobilise groups, political language attempts to obtain the greatest symbolic impact for maximum unifying potential, while remaining essentially ambiguous. Therefore, political symbols are almost by definition all condensation symbols.

The abstractions proper to political symbolization stress that symbolic quality which is directly linked with the functional nature of these symbols: their emotive signification. According to Graber [1976] the symbols' emotive signification derives from the fact that condensation symbols are:

> "stimuli which carry little independent information but which activate a wide variety of similar perceptions and connotations in their listeners. These perceptions and connotations usually involve fundamental social values and are fraught with emotions". [Graber 1976:318-319]

Similarly, Elder and Cobb [1983:33] agree that because condensation symbols "have ambiguous referents", they are "heavily laden with emotive content". Specifically, according to Edelman [1964] typical condensation political symbols

> "evoke the emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them." [Edelman 1964:6]

Scholars agree that symbolic signification functions mechanically without the need for the receiver to be consciously aware of the structure of the symbolic process

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[9] Turner1967:50. For the analysis of the symbols' polysemy in rituals see also Munn [1973:580].
[10] See also Moore and Myerhoff, [1977:5].

and to reflect on the symbolized. Therefore, symbols are crucial in political communication, not only because they provide representations of otherwise abstract entities, but also because of the emotional reaction that they can spurn and possible conative effects: symbols sometimes do away with the need for debate and direct people directly into action. In this sense symbols, as representations of abstract collective entities, powerfully raise a sense of belonging:

> "[i]n fact, without condensation symbols most social groups, large or small, would not be able to produce the feelings of mutuality which are needed for group cohesion and action. Social movements which seek to generate strong ties among their followers may take painstaking care to create effective condensation symbols."[Elder and Cobb 1983]

Symbols of the Nation

Symbols of the nation are necessary elements for the definition of nationhood and of national identities. While facilitating the process of identification, they also promote unity and cooperation and stand for the values and ideals of the nation-state. But what are the symbols of the nation? What are we going to look at? Symbols of nations and nationalism are those symbols that express and help to forge the character of national identity. Official symbols of the nation (the national emblem, the national anthem, and the national flag) are the most obvious ones; however, historic buildings, landmarks, postal stamps, and various insignia of national prestige and power are also important symbols that form part of the nationalist symbolic repertoire.

Political symbols find expression in a variety of representations: sometimes they are displayed alone and other times in public rituals. On these public occasions national symbols are paraded with the greatest vigour and are at their most impressive. By displaying the *miranda* of power, political rites dramatically represent the *credenda*. Secular political rituals are essential elements of the political system. They are connected with processes of political legitimation and can either be instruments of integration or of manipulation of consent [Kertzer 1988]. The political uses of rituals are diverse; however, they cover four major functions [Kertzer 1996]. First and foremost political rituals provide symbolic representations for organisations, or in our case, for the nation. Because nations can exist only through symbolic representation [Kertzer 1988], it is mainly through rituals that individuals are made aware of these

symbolic representations and are encouraged to identify with them. Rituals also provide the space where myths that sustain the nation are enacted and represented. Secondly, political rituals confer political legitimacy on both its sponsors and its participants. Political rituals present in highly compelling dramatic forms the legitimating ideas of power through the employment of powerful political symbols. Therefore, political rituals form the normative base of the socio-political order. As such they become expression of the values shared by the community, while being a vehicle for the exercise of power. This legitimating function of rituals can be an influential means to manipulate consensus and opinion.

Ritual action is also a structured system of staged political communication. As such it inevitably includes dramatic elements. Rather than focusing on the content of the message, these elements highlight its non-verbal aspects[11]. In addition to providing symbolic representations of power and being powerful instruments of legitimation, rituals also provide solidarity. By participating in public rituals of the nation, individuals are encouraged to feel like one. Aural and visual stimuli, the chemistry of the crowd, an emotionally charged atmosphere, all strengthen a feeling of solidarity and belonging. Lastly, rituals foster a particular understanding of the political reality, highlighting certain events, and concealing others.

Because iconicity is pursued by words and images, these answers will be given both discoursively and symbolically. The language of power and its key symbolic representations can be both verbally and visually represented (indeed, textual and visual symbols supplement each other) this thesis will look both at discursive and

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[11] Edelman, the most influential theorist of dramaturgy in the political context, defined a general theory of politics based on dramaturgy. Without going into details here, Edelman asserted that the effectiveness of any political message depends on the coherence between the nature of the scene and of the dramatic act itself, and concentrated many of his numerous works on the study of architecture and of the physical contexts of so called political rituals. Moreover, Edelman believed that the effectiveness of political messages also depended on the style of the language employed and on the leadership, which can control symbolic perception and meaning. For instance, public national ceremonies are highly symbolical actions where nothing is left to the case: the date, the location, the sequence of the events and the nature of the events itself; all these are carefully selected and bear a great symbolical potential [Edelman 1964].

iconic symbolism and will be constantly shifting between the two. As a matter of fact, power represents itself by way of words – written, spoken or sung – and images – in posters, monumental sculptures, films, and so on. Political art – which visually represents the symbolic repertoire – provides a complementary system of signification with its own implicit mythology and associations. The elaboration of meaning presented by visual means serves not only to complement the related verbal message but also to introduce heterogeneous elements, which produce new meanings. Words often accompany images thereby providing an important commentary to the visual representation. That is why it is important to juxtapose the analysis of oral and written discourse to its visual counterpart.

Certainly although the public image of a nation may be unified and appear symbolically simple, symbols of identity are nevertheless open to multiple interpretations. Indeed political actors often elaborate competing symbolical repertoires. The present study, however, is primarily concerned with the analysis of the 'official' symbolic imagery.

Theories of Nationalism

Addressing the question of how national identity is symbolically reproduced opens the discussion to different approaches to nationalism. As mentioned earlier, the practices of creation and dissemination of a sense of national identity – still a major preoccupation of contemporary India – are constituent parts of the nation-making processes. A fundamental assumption of this process is that nations are manufactured. This notion postulates the existence of an agent (or agents) drafting imaginative constructs [Foster 1997] of the nation and of national identity. Therefore, nation-making can be seen as an on-going process to "establish the hegemony of a particular imaginative construct" [Foster 1997:9].

Three theories inform most of contemporary political debates on nationalism: instrumentalist, primordialist and social constructivist. Despite nationalism being one of the most contested issues in our times, most political scientists now agree that nations are historically related to the advent of modernity and to the concomitant

economic and social changes. Some scholars such as Gellner contend that the advent of capitalism, industrialisation, the emergency of a bureaucratic state, the phenomenon of urbanisation accompanied by a diffuse feeling of displacement, along with the erosion of traditions, created a fertile conditions for the creation of new identities and, in particular, of national identities. According to this view, nationalism depends to a large extent upon social circumstances and societal transformations. This analysis categorically dismisses the existence of nations in pre-modern times, and reduces nationalism to a purely modern phenomenon.

According to the instrumentalist view of nationalism, nationalism is an ideology whose major components and cultural symbols are selected, generated *ad hoc* or manipulated by the political élites for the legitimation of their power, for mass mobilisation and for purpose of economic and political domination. This theory stresses the fact that nations do not exist primordially but, instead, are systematically created at particular historical moments to accommodate specific demands of political groups animated by economic interests. Ethnic identities are not fixed and innate; they change according to concomitant transformations. National identity is therefore fluid, changeable over time and socially acquired. Ethnic and national identities are tools in the hands of the élites struggling for political power and control of economic resources.

Paul Brass [1991] focuses attention not simply on the creative process entailed by the phenomenon of identity formation (like Anderson [1991] and Hobsbawm [1983]), but also on the conscious role of the élites in their manipulation of "traditions". For Brass [1991], the study of national identity formation is

> "in large part the study of politically induced cultural change. More precisely, it is the study of the process by which élites and counter-élites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interest, and to compete with other groups". [Brass 1991:75]

Although Brass attributes the process of identity formation to the dynamics of elite competition, he is also ready to acknowledge, like Smith [1986], the limits incurred

by the élites in the process of selection and transformation of symbols of ethnic identity as

> "[P]olitical and economical élites who make use of ethnic group attributes are constrained by the beliefs and values which exist within the group and which limit the kinds of appeals which can be made" [Brass, 1991: 16].

In fact, Brass does not deny the existence of 'primordial' attachments, but he believes that their mere existence is not sufficient to determine the outcome of ethnic or national identity during its formation, in that they can be

> "subject to substantial variation for the sake of political and economic interests [ ] they [do not] have to become symbols of group identity. They became symbols of identity because elite groups [ ] promoted them as such" [Brass, 1991: 85, 86].[12]

Critics argue that by emphasising élite manipulation of the masses and considering nations and nationalism as essentially constructed from above, the instrumentalists exaggerate the role of the élites and ignore the common people, who are treated as non-participant entities to the process of nationalism. Another criticism raised against Brass is that nationalism (or a particular symbolic national identity) seems to emerge only as a by-product of elite competition. Despite these concerns, Brass's analysis offers two invaluable insights for our research. The first is that the analysis of national identity formation should not stop at the study of single specific cultural symbols, but should instead identify a "grammar" or "syntax" of national

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[12] It is in view of all this that Brass himself, in the introduction of his *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, acknowledges that he is far from the most extreme instrumentalist positions and that his "aim is in no way to disregard or discard the cultural forms, values and practice of distinctive ethnic groups as unimportant". [Brass, 1991: 16]. He further explains:

> "[T]he values and institutions of a persisting cultural group will suggest what appeals and symbols will be effective and what will not be and may also provide traditional avenues for mobilization and organization of the group in new directions. Nevertheless, the leaders of ethnic movements invariably select from traditional cultures only those aspects that they think will serve to unite the group and which will be useful in promoting the interests of the group as they define them. When they do so, moreover, they affect the self-definition of the group and its boundaries, often to such an extent that the ethnic community or nationality create out of a pre-existing ethnic group may be a very different social formation from its progenitor." [Brass 1991: 74-75]

symbols. To fully grasp the process of national identity formation, Brass [1991] stresses the need to adopt a broader approach because the process of identity formation

> "involves the manipulation of a multiplicity of symbols and attempts to define a group in terms of sets of symbols. It is in the way in which symbols are combined and the emphasis given to particular symbols in relation to others that the boundaries of communities are established or break down". [Brass 1991: 99-100]

The second is mass communication's influence in the process. Consequently, the study of nationalism's symbolic construction must be accompanied by the identification of national identity's repertoires of symbols and cultural markers and by an analysis of the means of communication available and adopted by the élites.

Primordialists

The instrumental theory of nationalism runs counter to primordialist or evolutionary accounts according to which nations cannot be created at will. On the contrary, primordialists argue that nations evolved rather organically out of pre-modern ethnic formations. According to this approach, nations are primordial, natural communities endowed with a particular fixed identity, made up of language, customs, and creed where individuals retain attachments that provide for easy affinity with other people with the same background. Nationalism is then the expression (verbal and non-verbal, objectified, and symbolical) of what already exists and ethnicity is therefore an ascribed trait, fixed and consistent overtime.

The most significant arguments of this approach have been formulated by the ethno-symbolists – of which Anthony D. Smith is the most influential scholar. Although recognising the modernity of nationalism, ethno-symbolists do not agree with the instrumental model of nationalism. For the ethno-symbolists, the functionalist model proposed by the modernists does not take into account the need to supply the nations of constructions such as myths, symbols and common history and memory, if not for a purely instrumental end. Refuting part of the modernist approach to nationalism, Smith strongly disagrees with the modernists for their "systematic failure to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby precluding any understanding of the popular roots and

widespread appeal of nationalism" [Smith 1999:8-9]. In fact, ethno-symbolists contend that the pre-modern roots of nationalism – as expressed through pre-existing complexes of values, myths and symbols [Smith 1989:341-356] – are crucial to the formation of national identities.

> "For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbols, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges." [Smith 1999: 9].

Although Smith acknowledges that traditions, histories, genealogies, myth-symbol complexes of the nation are invented or, better, selected and adapted from a fixed repertoire for the specific purposes of nation building, he reiterates his attacks to the instrumentalists by insisting that history and culture

> "are not simply pretexts, by which the *atavistic emotions* of the masses ( ) are manipulated, nor are they simply *invented traditions* designed as Eric Hobsbawm claims, to channel and control the energies of the newly mobilized and enfranchised masses. History and culture form integral parts of the fabric of popular visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations are embedded and through which their élites must forge their strategies" [Smith 1999: 9].

Moreover, common tradition, national historical memory, myth-symbol complexes are necessary inasmuch as they fulfil man's need of making sense of the world around them. It is in this sense, that these cultural artefacts can trigger a sense of loyalty and self-sacrifice, and not simply because they are "natural" or deeply rooted in man's psyche or ethnic history. According to the ethno-symbolists primordial attachments evolve from history and myths of common homeland. However, the ethno-symbolic approach rightly emphasise that, although ethnies[13] do not constitute nations, they do indeed matter because they provide myth-symbol complexes for the

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[13] *Ethnies* are "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and culture, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity". [Smith 1986:32]

ruling élites without which, "modern nationalism would be rootless and arbitrary" [Breuilly 1996:150].

Constructivist Perspective

Criticism of primordialism has focused on its failure to explain the waxing and waning of multiple ethnic identities. Moreover, primordialist views do not sufficiently address the diachronic changes and continuities in national identities. What they also fail to consider is the role of the political context: why certain symbols were chosen at certain moments of time? And why did they change at all? Neither a primordialist nor an instrumentalist perspective, however, can adequately answer the questions as to how Indian national identity has been constructed, what shared symbols of identity were chosen, how the latter marked the boundaries within the nation and between Indians and others. I argue for a process of creation and invention of symbolic constructions of national identities, which are partly retrieved from common and traditional heritages, and partly fabricated by nationalist élites[14]. Constructivist approaches to the theories of nationalism are extremely useful in helping us understand the dynamics of national symbolic formations. Indeed, symbolic inventories respond both to materialist and ideological constraints.

Moreover, constructivism, which sees national identity as socially constructed, lends itself to assessing the problem of reproduction and maintenance of symbolic repertoires in ordinary times. For constructivists a strong state is one that encourages nationalist attachment within its population. The need for emotional attachment to the state is obviously more pronounced in times of war when symbolic repertoires are mobilised in various ways for the war effort (e.g., to justify conflict or in response to security threats). As nations need permanently to remind people of their commonality, it is the reproduction and maintenance of a sense of national identity in times of peace

[14] For some authors, nationalism in the new states became purely functional, a 'mobilisation system' [Apter 1963] in the hands of the élites in order to forge modern nations, in particular, to encourage participation and solidarity to achieve the common goal of social integration and economic development. Therefore, in order to mobilise the masses, the nationalist leaders had to build on the traditions of the people and pool elements from the ethnic resources often to awake collective emotions typically roused by traditional religions.

that is particularly important in understanding the role of symbolic repertoires in keeping a sense of nationality alive. Billig [1995] calls this is peaceful reproduction of nationalism 'banal nationalism'. This everyday form of nationalism despite its apparent naturalness constantly and silently reinforces a sense of national belonging. National holiday, sporting events, ritual celebrations where the symbols of the nation are prominently displayed strengthen attachment to the state while weakening competing sub-state nationalisms. And indeed it is through the repetition and reproduction of the symbolic repertoires that a sense of attachment to the nation is constantly reinforced.

Considering the interplay of this range of circumstances also allows us to escape the classical dichotomy pitting primordialists against instrumentalists on the nature of the nation and of nationalism. In fact, one could say that it combines the two classical approaches. According to Giesen [1988:12] "[N]ations are not givens but historical products generated and imagined in particular public discourses". From this point of view national identities are created situationally and are constantly changing [Lewellen 2003:163]. This constructivist perspective requires the presence of a collective political actor who would act as a signifying agent. This political actor – also called a cultural entrepreneur or even a socio-political archaeologist [San Martin 2002] – selects cultural elements from a wide repertoire and articulates them in a chain of signification that makes them acquire a new relevance – a cultural repertoire that the political actor cannot invent ex-novo. As Snow [2001] has beautifully put it:

> "[ ] identities are not fabricated whole cloth but typically knit together by drawing on threads of past and current cultural materials and traditions, structural arrangements and even primordial attributes. These material and attributes constitute the kinds of stuff from which collective identities – particularly ethnic, religious and national ones – are fashioned, and thereby function, in varying degrees, to constrain the construction process. [ ]". [Snow 2001:6]

From a constructionist perspective, the process through which identities are created, expressed, sustained and modified is particularly important. Snow [2001] calls these processes variants of 'identity work'. According to Snow [2001], at the core of 'identity work' is the

> "generation, invocation, and maintenance of symbolic resources used to bound and distinguish the collectivity both internally and externally by accenting commonalities and differences." [Snow 2001:6]

These symbolic repertoires function as

> "boundary markers of collective differentiation, distinguishing insiders from outsiders [ ] They congeal into a kind of 'semiotic bricolage' (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996) that gives symbolic substance to the claimed distinctive 'we', and it is largely through this bricolage that collective identity is expressed and known publicly" [15]. [ibid]

The debate between the theory of primordialism and constructivist and instrumentalist points of view has been raging for some time; however, increasing consensus has emerged in the last few years among the scientific community. Primordialist have come to accept some of the premises of the constructivist point of

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[15] Eisenstatd and Giesen [1995] maintain that collective identity is expressed through three symbolic codes: primordial, civic and cultural. It is these symbolic codes that help in the construction of a common shared frame of reference and define the distinction between us and them, the in-group and the out-group.
Primordial codes are what are usually believed to be natural givens: gender, kinship, blood ties in general, ethnicity, race, language, religion and custom that emphasise common descent and the perception of the group as one people. The boundaries identified by these codes are fixed, objective and unchangeable. These codes find expression in indigenous myths, narratives of origins, and exclusionary practices or symbolic rituals in processes of acquisition and allocation of resources in political mobilisation. According to Smith (1991 and 1995) these are codes of exclusion. In particular, primordialism allows for reinforcement of boundaries under conditions of rapid mobility and close proximity to others and offers strategies to defend the collective identity and its uniqueness against internal and external pressure for assimilation.

Civic codes emphasise historical continuity of identity. They are based on familiarity "of implicit rules of conduct, traditions and social routines that define and demarcate the boundary of the collectivity" [Eisenstatd and Giesen 1995:80]. In this case, the integrating norms are formulated independently from descent. Thus, civic codes do not presuppose that collective identity is based on something 'external' such as nature or the sacred. These codes allow for temporary permeability of boundaries enabling strangers to join in as only learnable rules of participation have to be followed. Strangers are thus not perceived as a threat. Interestingly and unlike cultural and primordial codes, for these codes of identity, belonging is not based primarily on the alterity between us and them. Membership is based on 'competent participation' in tradition-based civic practices [Schmidtke 1996:102].

Cultural codes are based on the alleged relationship between the community and the sacred, building on the unique relationship between the given group and the sacred and the sublime (god, reason, progress, or rationality). To outsiders, the boundaries are in principle open as long as there is willingness to adapt to the implicit social and political rule of the community. Strangers can be part of the group via education, cultural assimilation and conversion.

view and even for authors such as Smith the link between ethnicity and modern nationalism cannot longer be understood in a deterministic way. Traditional primordialist approaches have come under severe criticism particularly against deterministic assumptions marking the primordialist approaches to nationalism. The distinction between the social constructivist approach and the instrumentalist theory is somewhat fine. While both view the nation as a socio-politically constructed product rather than an innate entity, the instrumentalist approach is much narrower than the constructivist. Instrumentalists view the national identity as existing at a particular time and solely for a specific economic and political goal and cannot explain the persistence of group identification across time.

The constructivist approach to nationalism is very interesting and useful. On the one hand, because it assumes that the nation is not a fixed entity but a dynamic product constructed by a nationalist mobilization potential – in other words the specific context of cultural, economic and political circumstance[16] – it allows us to deal with the changing character of the Indian nation as it has been imagined over the years. The dynamics of creation of national identities are not only reduced to elite competition but they are also contextualised. Like the instrumentalists, social constructivism recognises that identity is not fixed but fluid. On the other hand, another interesting point of this approach is that it gives relevance both to the political opportunity structure and to the agency of the political actor as a cultural entrepreneur whose field of action is nevertheless limited in its elaboration of an idea of the nation. It focuses on the dynamics of identity formation, but it also addresses the origins of ethnicity by acknowledging that language, religion, physical characteristics, and culture, contribute to the creation of a set of identities people can choose from. As Gisen argues,

> "collective identity exists only if some people believe in it. [ ] Images of collective identity are adopted by individuals as true and real if these

[16] According to San Martin [2002:99] the nation must be considered as a "dynamic product, socio-politically constructed by the action of a nationalist movement under some given cultural, economic and political circumstances."

patterns correspond to the central parameters of their life-world and cultural frames" [Giesen 2001:40]

Imagination and Invention

The genesis of nations and the inventive character of nationalism have preoccupied many scholars in the past few years. Two of the most influential works demand mention here: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Traditions*, and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Both published at the beginning of the eighties, the two books address the question from two different perspectives: Anderson by individuating the factors that made the imagination possible – rather than going through different types of imaginations; and Hobsbawm by looking into the dynamics of the creative process itself, in particular, into one of the devices that made this imagination possible, the invented traditions.

Contrary to the conventional primordialist study of nationalism which was developed on the assumptions of a nation as a pre-existing, ethnic, uniform dormant unitary entity, Anderson – in his groundbreaking work, *Imagined Communities* – contends that the nation is "an imagined political community":

> "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [ ] It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" [Anderson, 1991:6-7].

Anderson's theory does not simply take into account the creativity of the process of the imagination of the nation. Rather, Anderson is as inclined to identify the forces that facilitated the development of the idea of nation-ness, as to delineate the process of imagination itself. In addition to stressing the creative character of nationalism, Anderson in the passage quoted above, acutely pointed out the non-accidental character of nationalism. Industrialisation and the development of capitalism accompanied by the development of communication technologies made

possible the imagination of homogeneous and unified communities, which became the basis of nationalism. Similarly, Anderson maintains that several factors facilitated the development of the idea of nation-ness: the standardisation of a commonly spoken language, which allowed communication and provided the basis for cultural identity; the development of print technology, which permitted the diffusion of collective ideas and information; the introduction of censuses, which classified and described society's members; and finally the identification and preservation of cultural monuments that could represent the people and the values of the nation [Anderson 1983: 4].

Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Traditions* examines how a nation constructs its origin and history through the selective remembering, forgetting and even invention of the past. In the opening pages of his study Hobsbawm gives a necessary definition of the invented traditions:

> "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past [...]" [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:1ff.]

Hobsbawm identifies two types of invented traditions: those resulting from the adaptation to new situations of old traditional forms and institutions, and the deliberate 'inventions' of new traditions created to comply with different and novel purposes. In general the first type is more common. It occurs when pre-existing material is selected and adapted from the repertoire of myths and symbols accumulated over time to construct traditions of a new type for novel purposes. When, however, historical continuity with the past was lacking, some traditions had to be deliberately invented *ex-nihilo*:

> "[E]ntirely new symbols and devices came into existence as part of national movements and states, such as the national anthem [ ], the national flag [ ], or the personification of the 'nation' in symbol or image, either official, as with Marianne and Germania, or unofficial, as in the cartoon stereotypes

of John Bull, the lean Yankee Uncle Sam and the 'German Michael'. [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:7].

Invented traditions perform three functions: they establish or symbolise social cohesion of real or artificial communities to help define collective identities, they establish and legitimise institutions to justify the creation of a new state, and they promote socialisation. Because nations need these strong symbolic constructions, nationalism cannot be studied without looking into these phenomena [Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:14].

Here, what is important is the issue of imagination per se in bringing a community into being. Despite the fact that only few of the elements identified by Anderson strictly applied to India which witnessed a limited industrialisation, illiteracy was raging, the spread of communication technologies was hampered by lack of resources and by the vastness of the territory, and standardisation of a common language happened only in form and interested only the elites (monumentalisation and censuses were probably the most important features that contributed to the imagination of the nation) Anderson's contribution is still valid. While supporting Anderson's thesis, I would argue that in India – as in other parts of the colonial world – the nation emerged as an imaginative construct also thanks to the combination of a well-established visual culture and language with those modern communication technologies identified by Anderson that helped the diffusion and dissemination of this 'visual vocabulary of nationhood' [Freitag 1995]. On the other hand Hobsbawm's stress not just on the inventiveness of tradition but on its repetitiveness, greatly contributes to the analysis of symbolic constructs in the creation and articulation of national identities and to the study of dynamics of management and reproduction of such symbolic repertoires.

Analysing Political Symbols

People tend to perceive politics and political dynamics as logical and rational. Gusfield and Michalowicz [1984:418] contend that it is Weber's view of a disenchanted, rationalised world that dominates our perception of modern political reality/dynamics.

Moreover, the alleged difference between modern and traditional societies has contributed to the relative disregard for symbols, rituals, ceremony and myth in modern political life [Kertzer 1988:x]. Various authors, however, including Elder and Cobb [1983], Bennett [1980], Dittmer [1977], Kertzer [1988; 1996], Lerner [1977] have referred to the significant role of symbols in politics and of symbolic repertoires in the construction of political and national identities. With some notable exceptions [Feith 1963; Foster (ed)1997], the study of the forms in which national identity is symbolically reproduced, I would contend, has mostly preoccupied scholars studying the political dynamics of the first world. Symbolic repertoires of the nation are seen as significant factors in the evolution of national identities in particular in America, Australia, Europe, Russia, Germany (Mosse 1975; Spillman 1997; Edensor 2002; Pitchford 2001).

New nations, however, provide a rich setting for the study of this phenomenon because often the process of nation-making is on-going. Moreover, as Geertz [1971] has noted, in these countries ethnic identification is in conflict with state nationalism as ethnicity has not been superseded yet by the identification with the state (civic nationalism). Whereas the importance of symbolic systems as factors in the construction of national identities is widely recognised in a variety of scholarly works, the role played by symbols and rituals within the nationalist discourse in India has been generally neglected. The study of political symbolism in India is usually confined to a single chapter or section and it has rarely been the subject of rigorous investigation. Moreover, scholars have generally turned their attention to either a particular historical period or to a specific symbol. In this respect, there are several appreciative studies of the political symbols of the anti-colonial movement and of Hindutva. The Nehruvian period – which provides a fertile ground for research – has hardly been adequately discussed[17]. I would contend that one reason for this could be found in the penchant among scholars to focus mainly on symbols that are derived from the religious domain. Indeed, religious iconography and symbolism have played an important role both in the anti-colonial movement and Hindutva. My contention, however, is that national symbols and rites of power are not necessarily rooted in religion and that all societies –

[17] Exceptions are Deshpande [1993], King [1994]; Masselos [1990]; Gupta [1994].

whatever their degree of complexity – require a common faith and common collective consciousness.

Thus, the dispute over the construction of the temple dedicated to Ram at Ayodhya prompted several investigations on various aspects of the question. Outstanding works – such as Nandy [1995], Hansen [1999] Bhatt [2001] and Basu *et al* [1993], who trace the genealogy of Hindutva ideology and discuss the history of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the Vishva Hindu Parishad – devote only a small part of their research to the study of the symbolic repertoires employed by the Hindutva political forces in the crucial years of the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, either by focussing on its most important symbol – Ram – or by examining Sangh Parivar's performative politics of ethno-mobilisation (e.g., Jaffrelot [1996], Assayag [1998], Hansen [1999], Bhatt [2001] among others). While these works present insightful analyses of Hindu nationalists' symbolic politics, other studies focus less on the symbolic inventories of national identity but provide detailed and useful readings of particular national symbols. Thus, the symbol of Mother India or *Bharat Mata* has been the subject of several interesting studies, as part of a gender-related analysis of nationalism in India and in particular in Bengal (sometimes spurred by Chatterjee [1993]'s study and his analysis of the differentiation of the public and private spheres in India and the influence of the latter on the conceptualisation and characterisation of the nationalist movement in India) such as Bagchi [1990], Bose [1997], Chowdhury [1992], Sen [1993] and Sarkar [1987]; or as an icon of the nation itself, often highlighting its visual representations in different media such as posters, pamphlets, stickers, and videos (Gupta 2001; Brosius 1997 and 2005; Mckean 1996; Surjit 1993 and Ramaswami 2003).

Literature examining India as *Bharat Mata* has also dealt with the Indian territory-geography's representation. The issue was raised mostly because Mother India is in general represented iconographically both as a woman (in accordance with Hindu representation of Mother earth – Prithvi) and as emerging from the map of the subcontinent (on this see Eck 1999, Ramaswamy 2001, and Geeti Sen 2002). Other

works, however, have focussed on India's post-colonial urban and industrial landscape (see in particular Bharadwaj 1983; Deshpande; Gupta N 1994; and King 1994) and offered an interesting reading of India's national space as a sign of national identity. Among these monographs dedicated to the analysis of a particular symbol of nationality, there are several (Cohn 1989; Bean 1989; Tarlo 1996; and Bayly 1986) devoted to study of *khadi* and of dress-codes adopted by Indians during the anti-colonial agitations, another important element of the symbolic capital of pre-independence nationalism, when cloth became a symbol of both colonial exploitation and nationalist self-assertion.

Other studies have focussed on the preformative and ritual aspect of Indian politics as symbolic process of construction of Indian national identity. For instance Assayag [1998] presents a penetrating critique of the Sangh Parivar nationalist processions of the 1980s while Kaur [2003] analyses the public uses of religion in Western India focussing on the Ganapati Festival as a discursive arena for competing nationalist strategies and on its *mandap* tableaux as loci for the narration and visualisation of the nation. Cashman [1970] and Freitag [1989] have analysed the significant part played by popular Hindu festivals and by other symbolic strategies – in particular see Freitag [1988] on the cow protection movement – in the definition of political identities during the anti-colonial movement. These studies proffer useful readings of performative politics and the importance of public rituals in the process of Indian identity-construction, but again the focus is more on religiously-derived political rituals than secular /purely political ceremonies with the exception of Masselos's [1990] analysis of Independence Day rituals and Gupta's examination of Republic Day Parade's venues.

The study of symbolic politics of nationalism in India is also concerned with issues related to media studies. The use of mass media – as Anderson [1991] notes – is and has been important in the transmission of a national culture. Visual media in particular is useful for the diffusion of symbols of the nation. Therefore it is not surprising that a large literature exists devoted to the analysis of the relationship

between mass media and nationalism. These works – written mainly in the 1950s and 1960s (Schramm 1964 and Pye 1963 to mention the most important) – considered mass media essential tools for national development and modernisation. Albeit acknowledging this important function, our interest in these works regards the importance of media not just for the promotion of modernisation and development but also for the diffusion of nationalist symbolic repertoires in India. In this respect, Farmer [2000], Gupta V S [1996], Chakravarkty Rangan [2000], Brosius [1999; 2005], and Rajagopal [2001] offer important contributions to the field. Rajagopal [1994, 2001] in particular presents a penetrating critique of the mass-mediated images rise to a prominence as a central locus of political discourse. Rajagopal highlights the emergence of a new era of symbolic politics and analyses the part played by the serialisation of the Ramayan epic on national television in India. Brosius [1999; 2005] explores the role of moving images and mass media in the process of representation of Hindutva. Despite a large amount of works devoted to the relationship between Indian cinema and nationalism (among many see Chakravarty 1993), and few publications on documentaries and short films produced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, there is very little on state-run mass media and the diffusion of nationalist symbolic repertoires. Worth mention here are the works by Ohm [1999]; Farmer [2000] Binford [1983] and Ghosh [1992] and Srirupa Roy [2003]. A central question on the genesis, reproduction, and maintenance of symbolic repertoires thus remains largely unanswered.

To summarize, while there have been several appreciative studies on symbolic repertoires of the nation, scholars have examined primarily religious imagery, focussing either on the Hindu nationalists' symbolic repertoires (both pre- and post-independence) or on the uses of religious symbolism in contemporary Indian politics and of political symbol on national media. The relationship of other symbols of national identity with mass media is rarely discussed. Therefore, a systematic and comprehensive study of the emergence and establishment of competing symbolic repertoires of the nation in contemporary India is still missing. What is also lacking is a chronological study presenting the evolution of symbolic repertoires of the nation

overtime. This thesis combines a chronological approach to a comprehensive analysis of hegemonic symbolic inventories of nationhood in India. This thesis considers a wide time-interval rather that focussing on a specific point in history and studies India's nationalist symbolic capitals while registering the changes overtime of these forms of imagination. This is an important feature because it helps us understand "the diversity of ways in which people imagine themselves as being or belonging to a nation" [Dickie, 1996: 21]. Moreover, this study is not confined only to the analysis of religious symbolism and religious rituals of Hindu nationalists but it expands to include secular symbols and ceremonials supporting the idea that rituals and symbolism not only pertain to the domain of religion or bear only on the political organisation of 'primitive' or exotic small scale society [Kertzer 1988] but are also crucial in the political arena of contemporary modern nations. The present thesis contributes to the current stock of studies on social construction of national identity in India and on the role of symbols as significant constituents of national identity.

Chapterisation of thesis

How therefore has the Indian nation been imagined? Through which ritual practices? What are the constituent elements of the symbolic repertoires expressing national identity? And how have they changed over time? These are some of the questions addressed in this study. In this thesis we will look at what Gellner calls 'garden cultures' [1983:7] or 'high cultures' which he defines as "a school-mediated, academy supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication" [1983:57]. In these centrally sustained cultures, official histories, values and norms about the nation are established. However, despite the control of the state apparatuses on such productions, "the fact remains that those who attempt to fix the meanings of nationalism [ ] must necessarily concentrate on a few selective, symbolic dimensions to suite their purposes" [Edensor 2002:vii]. The stress on high culture, on the bureaucratic state élites, their manipulation techniques and the implicit passivity of the audience seems to negate the dynamism of culture and the role of other cultural producers. This is not meant to deny that the nation is reproduced and signified also in the *banal* realm of everyday life [Billig 1995], which is an equally important aspect of the nation-making process. It is this dynamic

aspect of culture that leaves space and hope for alternative versions of nationalism to emerge and exist, "for a cultural elite propagating high culture is but one aspect of the production of national identity" [Edensor 2002:4].

This thesis analyses the role of national symbols in the construction of India's contested national identity by examining the competing symbolic systems that have emerged before and after independence. While bringing to the fore the complex relationship between the nation and pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources, the findings of this study shed light on the operational dynamics at play in the construction of nationalist myth-symbol complexes and national identity in India. The material is organised chronologically, and the argument is developed in five chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the national symbols developed during the Indian anti-colonial movement. This movement was characterised by the emergence of symbolic vocabularies, which created suggestive visions of the nation and became crucial elements in the shaping and development of an imagined national community. The third chapter deals with the rise in post-independent India of a state-sponsored national symbolic repertoire showing how the nation was made visible through a number of cultural representations, official narratives, and other symbolic constructions. The fourth chapter provides a visual and symbolic narrative to this important process of nation-making, examining also the ideological crisis of the 1970s and 1980s that followed the collapse of Nehru's brand of nationalism. The fifth chapter takes stock of the loss of appeal of the previous official symbolic constructions of India, in favour of the emergence of a competing symbolic repertoire manufactured by the Hindu right. These issues are further discussed in the sixth chapter, which also examines the manifestations of the symbolic system that has since emerged in contemporary India.

CHAPTER 2

Imagining India

National symbolic repertoires which created "evocative visions of the nation" [Freitag 2001] first emerged during the Indian anti-colonial movement. These suggestive images formed the core of a distinctive nationalist rhetoric and contributed to the development of India's imagined community, forming the basis for the participation of the Indian people to the public sphere. During the nationalist movement there were multiple visions for India and its symbolic repertoire found expression in a variety of media such as posters, photography, monuments, figurative arts, emblems, uniform, and public rituals [Freitag 2001]. The creation of a symbolic idiom was called for by pressing communication needs on the parts of the nationalist leaders. The nationalist leadership, who strove to bring the nationalist message to the masses, translated and popularised the nationalist ideology into familiar and intelligible forms that drew heavily on traditional modes of expression and on shared values. The employment of such shared symbols and values steeped in the Indian tradition contributed also to legitimate the movement and to give moral authority to its leadership. Moreover, the technological developments of modern communication introduced by the British (the railways, the telegraph and the boom in the national and vernacular press) all contributed to the fast diffusion of nationalist ideas throughout the subcontinent.

However, efforts of bringing the nationalist message to the masses by popularising it in intelligible forms, sometimes had the consequence of transforming localised, communal ideology and symbols into national ones. In particular, to gain a broader appeal, the nationalist leadership often resorted to symbols and practices drawn from the religious repertoires. According to some scholars, one of the most prominent in this tradition is Brass [1991], the justification for this does not simply reside – as it is usually held – in the backward character of the Indian masses who regarded their religious identity paramount and who therefore were prone to react to appeals made in the name of religion, but also on the manipulative intentions of the leadership. Whilst in agreement

with Brass, I also argue in favour of Smith [1989] according to whom nations rely on pre-existing complexes of values, myths and symbols. Therefore, it could be argued that in the process of creation and invention of symbolic constructions, the myth-symbol systems that support the nation are partly retrieved from common and traditional heritages, and partly fabricated by nationalist elites.

It is with these arguments and considerations in mind that in this chapter I explore the nature of symbolic codes of India's nationalist movement. How did the Indian nationalist movement articulate ideas of the nation and of national identity? Which were its ritual practices and which formats and media did it employ to communicate to the masses? The pre-independence symbolic repertoire is characterised by two dominant features: the use of traditional and familiar forms of communication and the utilization of religious idioms. I therefore begin with assessing the traditional methods of mobilisation in use in colonial India as it is through the analysis of propaganda and political campaigning that myths, symbols and rituals of the nationalist movement can be easily identified. I then provide an overview of the political idioms utilized during the nationalist movement. The following section establishes the setting in which these processes occurred, focussing in particular on the evolution of the methods of propaganda and mass mobilisation employed during the nationalist movement. In the last part I analyse the symbolic repertoire of Indian nationalism and its most important recurrent themes and symbols.

Methods of Mobilisation

Being a small movement led by a westernised and anglicised urban elite, at the beginning, Indian nationalism was expressed in written form, through the English and vernacular press, petitions and small publications alike. Later it developed a set of communication strategies for the most part based on already tested and sometimes more localised forms of protest. However, the movement lacked uniformity, as it was not necessarily a well-organised movement but a more spontaneous one. Moreover, despite the fact that the Indian National Congress came to epitomise Indian nationalism, it was by no means the sole political organisation that took part in the nationalist movement.

Political propaganda and mobilisation practices were therefore more likely to be uncoordinated than centrally organised. Only in particular cases, such as during the two most important non-cooperation mass campaigns of 1921 and 1930-31 was there better coordination. It is therefore not possible to talk of *a* nationalist propaganda. Even with the Congress at the height of its propagandistic efforts, a lack of uniformity and a certain degree of improvisation were the norm [Pandey 1975]. Despite this lack of coordination one can still detect a pattern of mobilisation that was characteristic of this period and that contributed to the creation of a specific imagination of the Indian nation.

In order to rally support to the nationalist cause, propaganda was directed at different recipients: the indigenous business community, some particular sections of society which felt excluded from the movement (such as the Muslim), the masses in general, the government, and the international public opinion. All political parties and also reformist religious organisations produced and issued propaganda material of all sorts. Nationalist propaganda was mainly carried out with the help of the written media: newspapers and books were widely employed to publicize nationalist ideology and campaigns[1]. However, given India's large illiteracy rates, non-periodical propaganda was greatly resorted to[2]. Pamphleteering[3], placarding (pasting of poster in public spaces), ballads, folksongs, *patias*[4] and symbolic activities such as collective performances where

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[1] The Indian press played a crucial role in the national and political awakening of India. By the end of the nineteenth century there were already five hundred Indian newspapers and journals both in English and in the vernacular languages [Pandey 1975].

[2] Pandey [1975] distinguishes between periodical and non-periodical propaganda. While the first debated the view of the leaders of the nationalist movement and general nationalist policy, non-periodical propaganda tackled a whole different range of issues more relevant to Indian masses. In the latter, exhortation and direct appeals to join the struggle, as well as 'congratulations for the great nationalist spirit displayed' [Pandey 1975:217] were dominant.

[3] Pamphlets were usually written in verses and in vernacular (or Hindi/English and a vernacular). They were sung at village fairs, or during festivals, appealing to religious sentiments, and to the shared reservoir of myths and folklore. Gupta [2001:96] with regards to the Cow Protection Movement notes: "[B]oth the handbills stated that they should not only be read, but narrated to others. In most of the villages of Faizabad, letters were circulated claiming that a 'akashvani' had warned not to give charity to Muslims, not to sell cattle to them and to have no dealings with them."

[4] *Patias* (or village telegraph as the British called it) were chain letters written generally in vernacular. Their main purpose was to incite mobilisation and frequently the recipient of the letter had to copy and send several other copies to other villages.

symbols or set of symbols were being paraded or used, were some of the methods used to give voice to the movement and mobilise support[5].

The majority of these modes of mobilisation found their origin in traditional forms of resistance to authority. Indeed, the perpetuation of the old modes of criticism of authority and of well-tried modes of public debate and protest became an important characteristic of the nationalist movement between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century [Gupta 2001 and Pandey 1975]. It is nowadays widely accepted that before the advent of the British and the emergence of an Indian public sphere proper, there already existed in India forms of resistance to authority and even of public debate [Bayly 1996]. These could either be expressed and transmitted by a well-established system of public debate and information order, or by staging forms of protest which would impinge on the moral obligations that bound the ruled with the rulers. India's traditional information order was not necessarily hierarchical and included all forms of communication, which encouraged the spread of social critique. These found expression in an array of written forms, which included poetic satire, handbills, placards, and newsletter. However, social critique was not limited to a written form. It included powerful oral and visual modes of communication, which encouraged the spread of public debate even among the illiterate. These forms consisted of ironic visual displays at public popular festivals, cultural performances of ballads and epics, public recitations and itinerant theatre companies [Bayly 1996].

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[5] For instance, the success of the Cow Protection movement – which spread across north India in the 1880s campaigning for the prohibition of the slaughtering of the cow – is believed to rest on its use of a combination of modern and traditional forms of communication. For its organisational support, the Cow Protection Movement not only relied on the establishment of regional and local *Gaurakshini Sabhas* (Associations for the Protection of the Cow) but also on *gau swamis* – itinerant preachers. While the *Sabhas* functioned as the centre of agitational and propagandistic activities raising funds, organising lectures and distributing pamphlets, poems and drawings, *gau swamis* toured extensively from village to village. They lectured also at market places and during fairs thus taking advantage of the large and often sympathetic crowds that collected there. Like traditional bards, these itinerant agitators made extensive use of visual as well as verbal traditional idioms. British records of the time [see for instance: LP&J/6/365 file 84, 1894, and SVN 1888] report of at least three different types of pictures that were publicly displayed during lectures by *gau swamis* in the first years of the 1890s.On this, see Freitag [1980].

Pre-modern forms of protest also revolved around a principle of civil disobedience and depended on a concept of moral authority shared by the rulers and by the ruled. Their nature – i.e. being derived from a principle of mutual moral obligations between the rulers and the ruled – dictated the forms that they eventually took. *Dharna, traga, koor, bunds*[6] were all widespread and well-known. Indeed, evidence of early nineteenth century disturbances shows that this type of civil disobedience was the most recurrent form of protest[7]. These were all forms of self-sacrifice and cessation of cooperation between the rulers and the ruled, whose success depended on the existence of a commonality of moral and ethical ideals between the involved parties who were expected to "share, even if temporarily, certain common socio-political or religious values" [Dharampal, 1971: XXVIII; LX-LXI]. Indeed, forms of resistance to authority were inherent to India's conceptualisation of power, although it should be observed that the purpose of such modes of protest was not to overthrow power but to remind the rulers of their obligations towards the ruled.

The Emergence of a Religious Idiom

In India, during the nationalist movement the symbolic repertoire was couched in a religious idiom. According to Donald Smith mass mobilisation in transitional societies is rooted in a religious idiom because religion can provide the nationalist leaders with powerful tools to mobilize the masses [Smith 1970:124]. The reason for this rests on the

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[6] *Dharna* or *dhurna* consisted in sitting – as a sign of protest – in front of the door or house of another person who was allegedly accused of wrongdoing. Both the protester and the accused were expected to observe strict fast and abstain from their usual occupations. *Traga* and *koor* were both practices of self-immolation, whereas *bunds* were a form of non-cooperation and resistance to authority particularly widespread in Maharashtra. *Patias* was widely resorted too. The reports that the Acting Magistrate of the city of Benares, W. Bird, sent to the Government at Fort William, during the house-tax protest of 1810-1811 can be particularly interesting. On 25th December 1810 he wrote: "The people are extremely clamorous: they have shut up their shop, abandoned their usual occupations, and assemble in multitude with a view to extort from me an immediate compliance with their demands" [Dharampal 1971:5]. Few days later, he reported: "...every class of workmen engaged unanimously in this conspiracy, and it was carried to such an extent that during the 26th, the dead bodies were actually cast neglected into the Ganges, because the proper people could not be prevailed upon to administer the customary rites." [Dharampal 1971:6]

[7] First-hand primary source material (such as texts of publicly posted placards, folksongs, popular paintings, illustrations by story tellers and contemporary records of pre-British time) of these and previous riots is very scarce. Evidence is mainly available from British records of the time (such as administrative accounts of protests) and from contemporary newspaper reports.

fact that "in traditional societies, religion is a mass phenomenon, politics is not: in transitional societies, religion can serve as the means by which the masses become politicised" [Smith 1970:124].

However, according to Haynes the utilization of a religious language is not just a matter-of-fact necessity but also a symptom of a search by indigenous elites for a counter-hegemonic political rhetoric. Haynes suggests three ways in which the elites can rhetorically address their audiences: a non-hegemonic pattern, a hegemonic pattern and a counter-hegemonic pattern [1991:26]. Different levels of accommodation and resistance to colonialism distinguish the three patterns. In the non-hegemonic adaptation indigenous leaders are not fully bilingual in the colonial and pre-colonial languages of authority and adopted the dominant language only temporarily and only when needed. In the hegemonic pattern the indigenous leadership is fully bilingual and consider colonially derived principles as commonsense. The under-classes are excluded while indigenous idioms persist in certain distinct public or private spheres of life. The counter-hegemonic pattern probably emerges from a previous hegemonic phase. The leadership is heavily exposed to hegemonic ideas but eventually see no bargaining power left. The indigenous elites therefore strive to create a new language that attempts both to escape and confront colonial rule. They still address the two audience using the language of the colonisers (even if only to subvert it) while evoking potent myths and symbols belonging to the vernacular languages in an attempt to combine the two languages [Haynes 1991:27-28]. Haynes' insights into the nature of the language adopted by the indigenous leaders to address audiences and transmit their demands is very important because it points to the symbolic behaviour – rhetoric and ritual – of the nationalist movement.

As the nationalist movement evolved, the utilization of a traditional idiom changed with time. One can distinguish between different phases. According to Haynes [1991] pre- and post-independent nationalist leaders in general followed the hegemonic pattern only to briefly abandon it during the counter-hegemonic Gandhian years[8]. It was

[8] Gandhian counter-hegemonic language eventually failed to become institutionalised as a

during Gandhi's years that a new language "rooted in local conceptions of religiousness and honor" [Haynes 1991:203-204] was created. It was through this powerful political idiom that the masses were persuaded "that it was not only possible to oppose the government and make it bend to their wishes but also a moral imperative to do so" [ibid.].

However, even before Gandhi's arrival, the Indian nationalist elites utilized a religious idiom. In Bengal during the anti-partition agitation in 1905, the nationalist elites made use of a political idiom couched in the *shakta* religious traditions of the urban Hindu upper castes [Southard 1980]. In particular, *shakta* symbolism, the imagery of the Hindu cult of Kali worship and Vedanta philosophy formed the basis of this political idiom. The nation was imagined like the goddess Kali who became a symbol of the motherland. Accordingly, nationalists were represented as her loyal devotees. The Bengalese patriot, Bipin Chandra Pal, urged his compatriots to use Kali Pujas to popularise the movement, while the popular annual Durga Puja was used to propagate the identification of the goddess with the nation [Southard 1980]. There are also records of collective vows being taken at Kali temples to abstain from foreign goods [Southard 1980:371]. However, I would argue, in Bengal the elites tended to follow the hegemonic pattern of adaptation to colonialism. The indigenous leadership embraced colonially derived principles and regarded them as commonsense. However, it also realised that it had to perpetuate pre-colonial forms of domination either to create a following or to maintain its elite status. It is therefore under these circumstances that pre-colonial idioms continued to be employed. Moreover, as Haynes, notes:

> "By appealing to members of their own society in the local idioms of indigenous politics and by engaging in behavior that provides a certain check on colonial policies, such as "inefficiency," "corruption," "nepotism," and other obstructions to progress, indigenous elites may sustain the support of critical elements of their own society. But at the same time, by maintaining a specialized control over the languages needed to communicate directly with the ruling group, the elite may effectively keep the larger population outside the most crucial domains of political decision-making. The underclasses are

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replacement for the colonially-derived language and according to Haynes the élites resorted once again to the use of a hegemonic language after independence.

> unable to participate in the outer arenas, where the shape of the larger polity is determined, because they lack access to the necessary linguistic tools. This contributes both to the maintenance of colonial hegemony and to the perpetuation of underclass dependence on the elite, that is, to factionalism." [Haynes 1991:26-27].

Indeed, according to Southard [1980:354] the utilization of this type of religious idiom was not for mass mobilisation as the masses were either Muslims or followers of the Vaisnava cult of Radha-Krishna. On the contrary, the utilization on the part of the anti-partition leadership of the *shakta* symbolism was to guarantee the support of the landed upper castes. It was an attempt to integrate the urban English educated upper castes with the rural upper castes through their common religious traditions.

While the Bengali elites showed a lack of concern with the choice or utilization of a religious symbolism that could have appealed to Muslims and Vaishnavas and risked to split the masses according to religious lines, Gandhi's religious idiom offered the leaders "an opportunity to reach out to large numbers of people more effectively than they had been able to do through their specialized appeal" [Haynes 1991:212]. Gandhi's strength lay in having broken decisively from a language embedded in colonially derived principles of constitutional justice and in having created a new political language. Gandhi defined his vision with a language steeped in Hindu religious tradition and discourse, using concepts of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *tapas* (self-suffering or penance), *tyag* (renunciation), and *dharma* (duty). He also refused the myth of evolutionary change upon which colonial rule was based. He created a counter-myth that was based upon the intrinsic superiority of the Indian civilization which was being undermined by the contact with the West. Turning upside-down the colonial-nationalist assumption that spirituality, anti-materialism, the principle of non-violence, and the belief in the social duties were a sign of India's weakness and backwardness, he suggested instead that they were the source of India's strength. In a similar fashion he defined the Indian nation in terms of shared cultural traits rather than of an assumed overarching political unity [Haynes 1991].

The language employed by Gandhi not only rejected the forms of the standard vocabulary of public politics, but infused it also with a potent terminology derived from

devotional Hinduism. The strength of Gandhi's rhetoric lay in its metaphorical value that

> "created powerful cognitive associations between terms drawn from two previously distinct idioms: the distant, baffling, and emotively neutral language of public politics and the more immediate, emotionally charged language of Hindu and Jain religious experience [...] [The new idiom] had an immediacy and a power absent in parliamentary tradition and civic debate [...] offering powerful new cultural meanings that would inspire or even coerce participation in public politics". [Haynes 1991: 221, 223]

The Settings

As mentioned before, the predominantly elitist character and 'mendicant constitutionalism' of the Indian National Congress [Khilnani 1997:26] was responsible for the nature of its early propaganda. For years, the Congress remained just an elite movement[9]. It was isolated from the masses and for the first twenty years it was dominated by an English educated, upper caste/class Hindu minority. Whilst pleading complete loyalty to the British crown, its main goals were to increase participation of educated Indians in the public administration and in the political life of the country (on the lines of the opposition in Westminster), improve the living conditions of the Indians mainly with regard to education, reduce the cost of military and civil administration, cut down and reform land revenue to encourage agricultural production, protect and promote indigenous industries and finally maintain freedom of speech and of the press. Significantly its propaganda was primarily directed at the British government, rather than the Indian masses. Indeed, Congress delegates were speaking for the people of India not to them[10]. Not surprisingly then, propaganda was mainly in written form: petitions and resolution were passed and signed; meetings were held while the press duly reported and

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[9] The Indian National Congress was born in 1885. However, during the first half of the nineteenth century, a nationalist conscience had slowly developed in India. This movement promoted social and cultural awakening, and was inspired by ideas of rationalism and humanism, with a stress on science and education for regeneration of India against its most obscurantist cultural practices. It was mainly directed towards religious reforms as many of the customs the modernising elites wanted to reform were sanctioned by religion. Various political associations and religious reform groups, usually provincial in character and dominated by traditional wealthy merchants and landlords, were established throughout the country. These associations exerted pressure through petitions, the press and mobilisation of public opinion at home and in Great Britain [Pandey 1975].

[10] When not directly addressing the British Government, Congress propaganda was directed to the British public to rally support for the Indian cause.

supported the movement. Having faith in the sense of justice of the British rulers and in constitutional agitation, petitions and the press were the only possible means of propaganda at their disposal.

The turn of the century brought some significant changes to the nationalist movement. The rise of the militant extremist wing within the Congress, who set more radical goals, was probably the most important of them. Extremists' ideas gathered momentum during the agitations against Viceroy Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal of 1905[11]. Instead of directing their attention to the educated upper class minority, for the first time the radicals identified in the masses the agents of the nationalist movement. But to draw the masses into the movement, the extremists – under the leadership of Bal Gangadhar Tilak – resorted to new types of mobilisation techniques. The political methods they advocated in order to popularise the movement were popular public festivals[12] as well as boycotts, passive resistance, and mass actions of self-sacrifice. People were mobilised through lectures, books, pamphlets, songs, poems, public meetings, gymnasium – such as the ones established by Barindra Kumar Ghose (brother of Aurobindo) for the physical and political education of the youth. In particular, mass public meetings, large processions, and *hartals* (strikes) became important methods of mobilisation. This change in mobilisation strategies not only had the merit of popularising the movement but it also altered significantly the symbolic language of Indian nationalism. If up until then, concepts of the nation and of national identity were couched in a predominantly westernised idiom, with the emergence of the extremists the movement employed a language that increasingly rested on indigenous traditions. New ways of imagining the nation emerged.

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[11] By 1900 the Bengal province extended from the Burmese border to the Gangetic plains. In 1905 Bengal was divided in two provinces admittedly for administrative purposes. By effectively cutting off the Bengali's Hindu élites (based in Calcutta) from the Muslim majority based in the eastern part of the province, the partition sparked fierce opposition among the nascent nationalist movement, which interpreted Lord Curzon's decision as an attempt at dividing the movement along class and religious lines. The protest movement that emerged was expressed mostly through the boycott of British goods and the support of *swadeshi* (indigenous) industry. The partition of Bengal was eventually revoked.

[12] On Tilak's innovative methods of mobilisation and on the emergence of *performative politics* see Kaur 2003.

By 1910, the mobilisation against the partition of Bengal had subsided. However, soon another important event contributed to the radicalisation of the nationalist movement. The First World War had a significant impact on the Indian opinion with regard to the nature and purpose of British rule in India [Brown 1999]. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the enactment of the Rowlatt Acts of the same year that extended the emergency coercive powers assumed by the British Government during the war, further exasperated the now politically self-conscious Indian masses. Demonstrations and strikes were held throughout the country. Whereas previously the Congress petitioned the British government to grant administrative reforms, by 1916 even the so-called moderates were asking for an advance towards self-government, or *swaraj*[13].

In the same years, the emergence of Gandhi[14] as the new Congress leader was a turning point for the struggle for independence. The way in which politics and mass mobilisation were conducted from then onwards was a sign of this political transformation. Gandhi introduced novel methods of protests that he had devised while working as a lawyer in South Africa. *Satyagraha* – literally 'truth-force', but also meaning passive resistance and disobedience to the law – lay at the core of his mobilisation strategy. The non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaigns that followed involved a popular programme of opposition to the government that included not only symbolical activities such as resignation of titles and honours, refusal to participate in elections and legislatures, non-payment of taxes, general strikes, public fasting, sit-ins, boycott of government schools, courts of law, jobs and even of foreign goods, but also saw the creation of a core of symbols such as a nationalist flag, a national uniform and a national hymn. These changes allowed the emergence of a new pattern of political participation and the final transformation of the Indian nationalism from an elitist movement to a

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[13] This call for *swaraj* was ratified by the Congress and Muslim League on December 1916. This came to be known as the Lucknow Pact. The Pact also sanctioned the agreement between the Congress and Muslim League. For the first time the Congress recognised the Muslim League as the political party representing the Muslims and agreed to the institution of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims in the Provincial and Imperial Legislative Councils.

[14] The bibliography on Gandhi is immense. A good biography is Brown 1989. Brown 1977, Kumar (ed.) 1971 and Sarkar 1976 offer excellent accounts of Gandhi's political thought and politics.

popular one.

The change of mobilisation techniques and the inclusion of the masses in the movement brought a change in the articulation of ideas of the nation and of national identity and an indigenisation of the nationalist idiom. Indeed, one could argue that one of the main reasons behind Tilak's and Gandhi's success resided in their use of a symbolic repertoire of nationalism largely derived from traditional forms of protest and rooted in familiar discursive and visual languages. However, despite the traditional roots of the nationalist forms of propaganda, it should be made clear that it was a combination of traditional and modern elements that characterised India's late nationalism. Indeed, the nationalist movement was an entirely modern phenomenon. However, by employing a familiar idiom made-up of equally familiar images, popular myths and stories this new message of a national identity could be conveyed without fear of misunderstandings or failure of communication. It was the use of traditional myths and symbols – that were *re*invented and *re*interpreted (as the Cow protection movement testifies) – and the employment of long-established forms of resistance to authority that "help to explain why political leaders in a poor country with a relatively low rate of general literacy should have been able to create a widely diffused and popular nationalist movement so early" [Bayly 1996:2].

The Symbolic Code of the Indian Nationalist Movement

The symbolic system of the nationalist movement was vast and it was articulated through symbols of space, through popular songs hymns and prayers, through the enactment of symbolic practices such as public ceremonies and rituals of iconoclasm such as the public burning of foreign cloth and through the employment and display of popular emblems. These symbols, rites and festivals were not simply superfluous appendages of the nationalist movement but were its main instruments [Figes and Kolonikskii, 1999]. The non-marginality of symbolic politics did not escape the British authorities who repeatedly tried to ban the use of such symbols (such as the singing of the song *Vande Mataram,* the flying of the national flag and even the wearing of what came to be known as the 'Gandhi cap') and the performance of certain symbolic activities.

The symbolic idiom of the Indian nationalist movement ideally articulated concepts of cultural and territorial unity, pan-Indianism, *swadeshi* (indigenousness), and integration. Unity was symbolised by the representation of natural borders and by resorting to images of India's sacred geography, while pan-Indianism was typified by elements of cultural syncretism and assimilation. Unity and integration were also symbolically enacted during the celebration of public rituals. *Swadeshi* was symbolised, among other things, through the choice of an indigenous lifestyle. Nationalism passed from a phase of acute westernisation and rejection of all things Indian, to a phase of neo-traditionalism. With the revaluation of Indian traditions the Indian elites switched to vernaculars, Indianised their customs, dresses, eating habits and tastes in interior design (the abrupt change of lifestyle of the Nehrus is emblematic of this period). By encapsulating the idea of India in a new wholly Indian symbolic idiom they created a new national style, mirroring a desire for the emergence of an aesthetic that would be distinctly Indian. Indeed, *swadeshi* also points to the process of refashioning of India's cultural and imaginative contours when colonial formulations started to be critically confronted by the educated elites in a search for "an essentially Indian genius, an Indian mode of perception and thought that was often structured in critical counterpoint to the mind of Europe" [Tharu and Lalita 1993:71-72]. *Khadi*, the hand-spun, hand-woven fabric, became another powerful emblem of the nationalist movement along with the *charkha*, the spinning wheel, also a symbol of the movement's moral stance. Like other forms of political agitation, the nationalism modes of symbolic communication were necessarily based on pre-existing modes of expression. Because one of the aims of communication is readability, the material at the disposal of agitators was that one derived from pre-existing forms. This vibrant and lively tradition, which used the vocabulary and grammar of a popular idiom, was to be discarded with the coming of independence. A new national visual language, shorn of its religious iconographies – but also of its vitality – was to dominate India's post-colonial panorama. The section that follows is an account of the nationalist movement's prominent symbolic constructions.

Symbolic National Space

According to Smith nations identify "a definite social space within which members must live and work, and demarcate an historic territory that locates a community in time and space" [1991:16]. The construction of a nation in terms of territory is probably one of the most powerful and explicit symbolic markers of the community. Nations are indeed spaces of primary belonging and "national space provides a common-sense context for situating identity" [Edensor 2002:65]. The nation is spatially distinguished as a bounded entity with borders that separate it from other national entities. The definition of physical national borders understood also as cultural boundaries is important in the designation of a national community in that "the consciousness of the community is [...] encapsulated in the perception of its boundaries" [Cohen 1985:13]. According to Thongchai [1994] among the practices of imagination of the nation, the identification of the national community with what he terms a 'geo-body' – a territorial entity – was crucial for the visualisation of the nation. Edensor [2002:40] contends that nations are conjured up by images of a particular landscape which becomes a synecdoche "loaded with symbolic values" that "stand for national virtues". This is what Short [1991] calls 'national landscape ideologies'. Landscape is a signifier of national identity because it can "combine geographical belonging with complex narratives of human exploits, extraordinary characters and cultural historical heroes" [Archetti 1998:189]. Because in India there was an isomorphic relationship between cultural geography and sacred geography, places that acquired national symbolic potential belonged for the main part to the religious domain. Therefore, India's symbolic national space became coterminous with the concept of India as a holy land. The reason for the pre-eminence of a religious symbolic space most likely rests on India's imputed lack of political unity. Politically, the land has always been fragmented in numerous reigns ruled by regional dynasties. Only the Guptas, the Mauryas and the Mughals under Akbar created large empires that encompassed the width and breadth of India.

This conceptualisation of the national territory as a sacred land became an important symbol for the representation of the Indian nation [Mandelbaum 1972:401]. Indeed, in India there existed a conception of a larger community even before colonialism

[Van der Veer 1994], and before the emergence of a public sphere proper and the creation and "participation in collective rituals informed by an ideological framework that came to equate 'community' and 'nation' [Freitag 1989:178]. Elaborating on the notion that nationalism does not replace "the bonds of local kinship" but expands them "so as to include larger populations in the nation" [Van der Veer, 1994:107], Van der Veer contends that pre-colonial practices of migration and pilgrimage – intended as "movements beyond the boundaries of local communities" [ibid] – provided the opportunity for the circulation of people, goods, and information and the transcendence of specific, local communities with the larger society creating a larger framework of reference which Indian nationalism would later appropriate. In Puranic literature India is the mythical *Aryavarta* or *Bharatvarsha*, a land whose natural physical borders mark out a sacred geography mapped out by its religious centres. In the epic narrative of the *Ramayana* it is the peregrinations of Ram – *avatar* (incarnation) of Vishnu – across the subcontinent to save the world from the demons, that instil a sense of territoriality and of sacred geographical unity [Van der Veer 1994].

This representation of India as a sacred land is therefore quintessentially Hindu. Indeed, this expanse is marked by several sacred centres linked among themselves by traditional pilgrimage routes that suggest a sense of geographical unity and sacredness. This sacred geography of the motherland is epitomised by the reverence to India's topographical features, its great rivers and mountain ranges within the Hindu traditions. The Himalayas and its peaks, the Vindhya mountain range, India's mighty rivers – the Ganges, Yamuna, Narmada, Kaveri to name only a few – all resonate with mythological associations and are sacred popular pilgrimage destinations. Besides the great mountain ranges and rivers, other places associated to Hindu mythological history are important Hindu pilgrimage centres. These are *tirthas*, crossing places, where "the gods have 'crossed down' into this world as *avataras*" and "where earthly pilgrims can make their spiritual crossings" [Eck 1998:65-66]. But it is also the entirety of India's land that is sacred for the Hindus. A popular pilgrimage sees the devotees circumambulate the whole country as they would for a temple, passing from the four *dhams* – where the divine is said to reside – at the four cardinal points at Badrinath, Puri, Rameshvaram, and Dvaraka.

This "Brahminic imagination of the Indian nation" [Khilnani 1997:161] formed the core of the Hindu nationalist discourse and was articulated at perfection by Savarkar – leader of the Hindu Mahasabha who coined the term *Hindutva* and provided a definition for the Hindu nation. A prominent element in Savarkar's ideology regarding the definition of the Indian nation is the equivalence of *pitrbhū* (fatherland) and *matribhū* (motherland) with *punyabhū* (holyland). In his definition, India's physical reality is at the heart of the definition of the Hindu/Indian nation. The word Hindu itself – which for Savarkar is a word that can be regarded equivalent to the adjective Indian, rather than an epithet that indicates someone's religious orientations – is derived from the name of the river Sindhu (Indus) that runs in the north-western plains of India. As such, the word Hindu does not denote religion, but only territorial belonging, thus giving the Indian nation its natural geographical boundaries. Indeed, the meanings of territory and belonging transmitted by the word Sindhu/Hindu are fundamental for Savarkar who argued that: "the most important factor that contributed to the cohesion, strength and the sense of unity of people is that they should possess an internally well connected and externally well demarcated 'local habitation', and a 'name' that could, by its very mention, rouse up the cherished image of their motherland as well as the loved memories of their past" [Savarkar 1969:66][15].

It is not surprising therefore that the Indian nationalism movement gave primacy to the geographical and physical features of India in its iconization of the geographical nation-space as a woman and Hindu goddess – Bharat Mata (Mother India). However, according to Ramaswamy [2003] the map of India – as produced by western cartography – did not become a "powerful emblem for the anti-colonial nationalism" as Anderson may want us to believe [Anderson 1991:175]. Although the map of India did become an important reference point of imagination for the nationalist movement, it became a powerful symbol of nationalism only when it was associated or embodied with the

[15] On Savarkar see Chapter 4 and 5

gendered image of Bharat Mata[16]. This association of Bharat Mata with the map of India was reproduced in the Bharat Mata temple at Banaras, completed in 1936. There, in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple dedicated to Bharat Mata, instead of the usual statue of the deity, there is a marble map of India [Gupta 2001] [Fig. 1].

Besides being reproduced in the geographical body of the map, another way to conceptualise the nation was to represent a gendered image of Bharat Mata superimposed or emerging from a map of India. Ramaswamy argues that the cartographic representation of the Indian nation is crucial as

> "the map of India that bestows upon Bharat Mata her status as a territorial goddess presiding over the emergent geo-body 'India', and that grants her an iconographic presence that distinguishes her from numerous other Hindu goddesses on whose she is clearly parasitic. [...] These bodyscapes facilitate the sacralisation of India's geobody in a way that would have been impossible for the scientific modern map with its disenchanted conception of territory" [Ramaswamy 2003:173,180].

In these instances, it is the superimposition of the cartographic image of India and the image of Bharat Mata that made the visual representations of India compelling. The territory was not just an impersonal territory but was animated by a sacred goddess. Personifications of India as Bharat Mata were not always accompanied or superimposed on India's geobody. Bharat Mata acquired an importance of her own. Bharat Mata was reproduced in a variety of visual media and was also invoked verbally in poems, songs and pamphlets. Iconographically, Bharat Mata could be easily mistaken for a Hindu goddess. In her complex and syncretic iconography and symbology Bharat Mata encompasses all aspects of the goddess. She is both the pure, nurturing mother and the

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[16] Cartographic representations of the nation space are closely connected to notions of landscape. This aspect of nationalism has been examined by Novak [1992] who argued for the relevance of landscape painting in nineteenth century America as a central signifier for to the discourse of nationalism. Similarly Pinney [1992:1], referring to the Nathdvara god posters (that became popular in the second half of the 1920s), argues that in India's popular prints (that needed not to be overtly political) landscape is "represented through a stylised aesthetic which expresses a historical and moral topophilia" and contributed to imagine the Indian nation as an ideal nation-space [Pinney1997: 861 ff].

powerful nation. In this, she becomes the embodiment and the repository of India's cultural values and heritage. The choice of depicting the Indian nation as a Hindu goddess was very successful because as such, Bharat Mata could assume different forms accordingly to the different aspects that the image wanted to evoke. When represented simply as the devi, she could be the benevolent mother or the faithful companion. But she could be also depicted as Kali, the black one, embodiment of unrestrained fierce energy, an image this one that fitted particularly well into the political idiom of nationalism.

Fig. 1 Relief Map of India – *Bharat Mata* Temple Varanasi

The symbolism of the French revolution initiated the fashion of representing allegorically the abstract ideas of liberty, freedom and the nation with female characters [Agulhon 1981]. The general conception of the iconography of Bharat Mata bears remarkable resemblance to this allegorical tradition. There is one depiction of Bharat Mata that has explicit thematic and formal correspondence with this iconographic nationalist.

This illustration appeared on the cover of the "United States of India" a monthly review printed in San Francisco by the Pacific Coast Hindustani in 1923. This drawing shows a stately female figure in a long pleated garment (reminiscent of a sari) of classical inspiration and long flowing hair parted in the middle, floating in the air. Like other images of Mother India, she emerges from the map of India [Fig. 2].

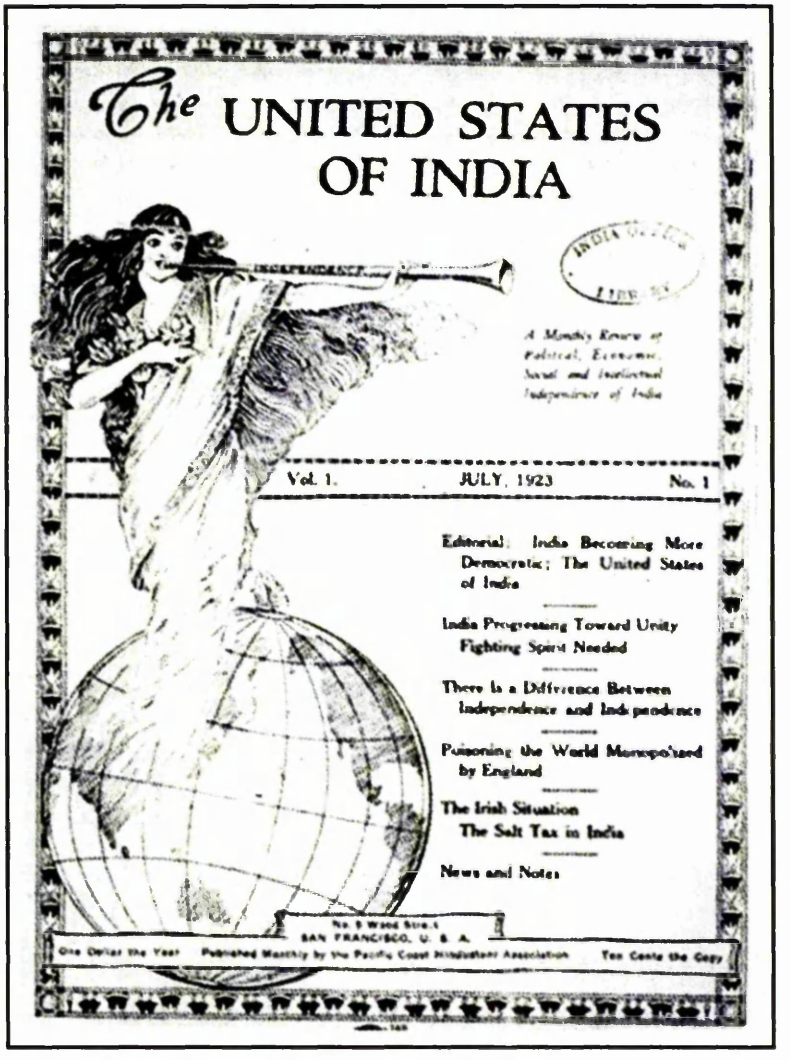

Fig. 2 *The United States of India*

This time the map of India where her feet disappear is part of a globe. Like Ravi Varma's painting *Tarini* (see below), her sari blown by the wind takes the shape of the subcontinent. With her left hand she is holding a bunch of lotus flowers on her breast;

with her right hand she is blowing a long trumped (a call to army?). Despite clearly harking on iconographies typical of India's figurative art, this visualisation of India as a young nymph was heavily influenced by a visual idiom derived from Western nationalist tradition [Fig 3].

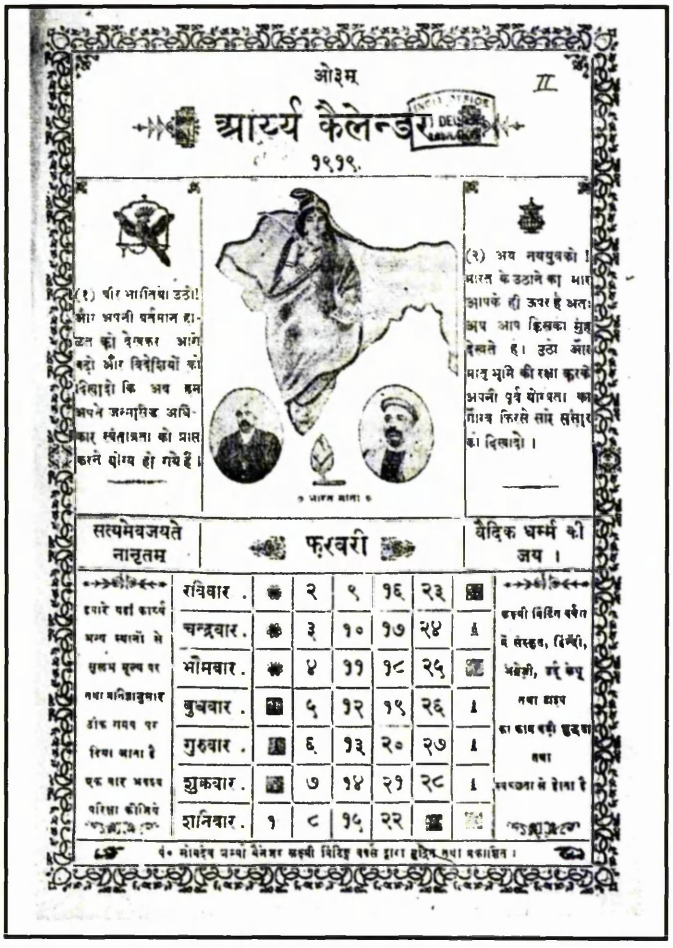

Fig. 3 Bharat Mata Emerging from Map of India – *Om Arya Kailendar* 1919.

On the contrary, in popular political prints, the general conception of the form and iconography of Mother India bears remarkable resemblance in terms of figuration, composition, and posture to the depiction of the female deity of god posters. Bharat Mata of the bazaar posters is mostly fashioned after three principal Indian goddesses, Durga, Kali and Lakshmi – only few of the many manifestation of the goddess[17] – combining the

[17] Within the Hindu pantheon goddesses occupy a place as prestigious as the one occupied by male gods. Every Indian village has its own *grama-devi*, village goddess, who is the incarnation of the

most salient iconographical traits of the three divinities. Goddesses are in general depicted as beautiful young women, sensual yet voluptuous conjuring up the image of the attractive maiden and of the nurturing mother. Like Lakshmi and Durga, Mother India wears a red[18] sari, enriched by gold decorations. She is heavily bejewelled: necklaces, bangles, rings and earrings richly adorn her figure.

A crown – symbol of sovereignty – adorns her head. Like Durga, she is sometimes depicted riding a lion or a tiger. She carries a trident and the Congress flag is usually depicted resting on her right shoulder. While the trident is reminiscent of Durga[19], the Congress flag identifies her as Bharat Mata[20]. Because in traditional iconography right is the side usually associated with the goddess' destructive energy[21], the Congress flag resting on her right shoulder is like a weapon and Mother India becomes a fighter for the nationalist cause. In a print called *Aryamata*[22] she is depicted exactly like Durga: wearing a white sari[23] with an ornate border and a blouse, she is sitting on a rock with one of her foot resting on a crouching tiger. She has four arms in which she holds the typical attributes of Durga: a two-pointed spear, a trident, a mace, and a scimitar [Fig.4 and 5].

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cosmic *devi*. Goddesses are worshipped as the personification of the female principle of creation and reproduction and they are often called with the appellation Mata, Amman, Ayi, mother. Their creative and reproductive power is epitomised in Hindu mythology by the concept of *shakti*. *Shakti* is the primordial energy without which the universe could not have been created and it is conceptualised as a female being. *Shakti* worship is the worship of this power, which is personified as a female and is generally conceived as the all-pervading mother goddess who is regarded according to this tradition as the supreme creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe.

[18] In Hindu iconography red is the colour generally associated with fertility.

[19] The trident is also one of Durga's many weapons.

[20] While Mother India's iconography is heavily borrowed from other Hindu goddesses', the Congress flag is the only item that is proper to the iconography of Bharat Mata.

[21] On the right hand(s) the goddess usually holds several weapons, while on the left hand(s) she holds symbols of her creative powers (plants, pots etc).

[22] British Library EPP1/38.

[23] In Hindu iconography Saraswati usually wears a white sari, symbolising purity and simplicity.

Fig. 4 *Astra Dan* – Bharat Mata/Durga bestowing a sword to Subhas Chandra Bose

Fig. 5 Durga – Traditional Iconography

Other mages of India that drew even more on the mythological and iconographic traditions of the subcontinent became very popular and acquired a much longer appeal than the typical bazaar paintings. Ravi Varma's *Tarini* and Abanindranath Tagore's *Mother India* of 1905 belong to this tradition. Ravi Varma's *Tarini* was considered the first example of the personification of Mother India as a young woman, but it was Abanindranath Tagore's *Mother India* that epitomised the elites' nationalist aspirations for the first time. Abanindranath Tagore water-colour portrait of Bharat Mata is probably the first fully successful attempt to objectify the ideology of the national movement, merging it with Hindu traditional iconography. Its overtly political tone becomes more evident if we place it in the context in which the painting was created. The anti-partition *swadeshi* agitation rocked Bengal in 1904-1905 and the painting is Abanindranath's contribution to the *swadeshi* movement. By 1907 Abanindranath was recognised as the greatest Indian painter, having set the parameters for and created a new Indian iconography deriving his inspiration from classical Indian literature, Hindu mythology and Indian history. In this painting, Bharat Mata is conceived as the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, clad in the robes of a Vaishnava nun. Depicted with four arms as a conventional Hindu deity, she carries four unconventional objects: *anna* (food), *vastra* (clothing), *śiksha* (secular knowledge) and *dikśa* (spiritual knowledge), thus symbolising economic, cultural and spiritual *swadeshi* [Mitter 1994:295]. In the nationalist metaphor, she is symbolically both the embodiment of the land and the nurturing mother and wife who sustains her children and husband in their fight to defend and liberate her, providing the tools – the objects she held in her hands – to achieve these goals. Metaphorically she is thus the *shakti*, the active female energy having found inspiration in the traditional Hindu iconography where the tantric tradition of *shakti* had represented the divine mother in her iconic manifestations as Ganga, Yamuna, and Durga[24]. [Fig.6].

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[24] For Sister Nivedita the propaganda value of the picture of Mother India (particularly Abanindranath Tagore's) was invaluable. She wrote that she would reprint it "by tens and thousands, and scatter it broadcast over the land, till there was not a peasant's cottage nor a craftsman's hut ..... that had not the presentment of Bharat-Mata somewhere on its walls" [Sister Nivedita, *Works*, III:60, quoted in Mitter 1994:296].

Fig. 6 Abanindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata

Ramaswamy [2003] traces the origin of the representation of the Indian nation as a woman to the 1870s when Kiran Chandra Bandyopadhyay's play, *Bharat Mata,* first performed in 1873, popularised the image of India as a dispossessed motherland. However, the tradition of representing the Indian nation with a strong gendered and religious[25] symbolism can be ascribed to the influence of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's popular novel *Anandamath* [26] (Bhattacharya [2003], Bagchi [1990], Sarkar [1987] and Ramaswamy [2003]]). This popular novel not only inspired the visual idiom of Bharat

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[25] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee made Hinduism central to the concept of nationalism and his imagery rested on this notion.

[26] Although the novel *Anandmath* tells the story of Bhavananda planning an armed insurrection against Muslim rulers of Bengal with his band of *sanyasis,* the poem *Vande Mataram* included in the text quickly became one of India's most popular patriotic songs particularly after the insurgencies that followed Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal in two separate provinces in 1905. In Bankim's novel, *Vande Mataram* is the hymn sung by the *sanyasis,* the followers of the ascetic Bhavananda who have relinquished all their earthly possessions and family links to devote their life to the cause of motherland personified as the goddess Durga/Lakshmi. Therefore, the song is essentially a hymn in honour of India conceived as a Hindu goddess. For the text of the song *Vande Mataram see* Appendix 1. See later for a discussion on the importance of songs and hymns in the nationalist symbolic repertoire.

Mata[27] but also marked the invention of a particular *matriotism* [Gupta 2001], which combined European political concepts of the nation-state and of patriotism with the complex tradition of mythological elaboration and ritual worship of the Hindu *devi*. This *matriotism* was also a successful combination of the heroic imagery of *Anandamath* and the elements that defined Savarkar's Hinduness.

The reason behind *Anandamath*'s significant impact onto the nationalist symbolic repertoire perhaps rests on the powerful representations of the motherland that occur repeatedly in the text. Two passages are particularly important. The first one occurs when Mahendra is shown around the various shrines of the monastery [Part I, chapter II] and the second one is the hymn *Vande Mataram* itself. The rise to prominence of the hymn *Vande Mataram* as a national symbol will be dealt with later on. What is of importance to us here is Bankim's conceptualisation and iconisation of the motherland. Both instances were extremely important for formation of the symbolism of Mother India. In the first instance, Mahendra is shown images of Mother India as she was, as she is and as she will be. The first image is an image of the goddess as "the bearer of the earth, perfectly formed and decorated with every ornament[28]" [Lipner 2005:150]. The second image of the Mother-as-she-is is a naked Kali "[B]lackened and shrouded in darkness [...] robbed of everything" [Lipner 2005:150]. Finally, Mahendra is shown as image of the Mother-as-she-will-be: a golden ten-armed image of the goddess. The imagery evoked here is poignant:

> "Her ten arms reach out in ten directions, adorned with various powers in the form of the different weapons she holds, the enemy crushed at her feet, while the mighty lion who has taken refuge there is engaged in destroying the foe. Behold her whose arms are the directions [...], who holds various weapons and crushes the enemy and roams on the lordly lion's back, who has Lakshmi personifying good fortune on her right, and the goddess of speech who bestows wisdom and learning on her left, with Kartikeya signifying strength and Ganesh good success, in attendance!" [Lipner 2005:150]

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[27] The first example of the visual identification of the nation with a woman is of 1885 when Harishcandra Haldar illustrated Bankim's hymn *Vande Mataram*, in the Bengali's children's magazine *Balak* [Guha-Thakurta, 1992:90].

[28] "she who subdued the wild beasts such as the elephant and lion underfoot and set up her lotus throne in the dwelling place. She was happy and beautiful adorned with every ornament, radiant as the risen sun and full of majesty" [Lipner 2005:150]

It is this later graphic representation of the motherland that was to have incredible influence on the nationalist symbolic repertoire. As we have had occasion to note earlier on, in popular political prints, the iconography of Mother India borrowed heavily from the most salient iconographical traits of the goddesses Durga, Kali and Lakshmi.

Vande Mataram elaborates further the theme of the personification of the land as a woman and eventually as a goddess. In the first stanzas of *Vande Mataram* is predominant the identification of the land with the image of a woman. The rich and evocative descriptive vocabulary (see Appendix I) builds upon a very well established symbolism of the land as a woman which is steeped in the Hindu tradition. This point is further substantiated by the identification of the land with the image of the goddess in the following stanzas that mirrors a powerful and implicit theology organic to Hindu devotion [Lipner 2005:97].

To sum up, the general conception of the iconography of Bharat Mata has its origins in Bankim's novel *Anandmath* and it hinged on pre-existing symbolic constructs and familiar repertoires of images and representations. It is therefore feasible that the striking popularity of Mother India's visual vocabulary rested with the recognisability and intelligibility of the visual and verbal image of the land as a woman and as a goddess set in the Hindu traditions. Indeed, Bharat Mata's extraordinary appeal was based mostly on its origins rooted in the religious and cultural traditions of India. While *matriotism* (the identification of the nation as a nurturing mother) is a common feature of nationalist movements around the globe, Bharat Mata is expression of a particular form of pietism steeped in Hindu traditions of devotion. Bharat Mata is not only the allegorical representation of the nation, she is a Hindu deity in her own right, with modern temples, prayers and rituals specially dedicated to her. That is, while resting firmly also on the influence of modern nationalist politics, and on the European political concepts of nation-state and *matriotism*, Bharat Mata exceptional significance and role within the Indian nationalist movement was thus rooted in India's folkloric religious traditions

The nationalist movement provided several iconic and an-iconic representations of Mother India. But what exactly does the predilection for an allegorical yet religious representation of India as a woman and as a female deity really mean? This blend of the allegorical representation of the nation with traditional Hindu iconography symbolises a new synthesis of past and present, modernity and tradition. Conceptually Bharat Mata is modern – nationalism is a modern phenomenon – but (iconographically) she is ancient. She became both the idealised Indian woman and the metaphorical nation. As the epitomised female, she is pure, nurturing and motherly, yet, as the mythological Devi, she is physically powerful and terrible. She is the visual expression of the principles of power and prosperity.

The identification of the Indian nation with a female figure and its iconographic representation as Bharat Mata served also to conceptualise notions of national identity in two distinct ways. On the one hand, the map-like image of Mother India became the metonym of Indian nationalism, the embodiment of a vision of India's unity, history and heritage. In the representations of India as a geographical map India's different communities were brought into relationship with each other through their shared relationship to some specific ideologically loaded landscape. On the other hand, in the representation of India as a goddess the bond between the nation and its citizens is mediated through religion. That is the people of India emerge as a nation only in relation to the sacred and the nation takes the form of a collectivity of people united by religious practices and beliefs. Indians are therefore those who inhabit the land that circumscribe her body, who revere her as a goddess and who are ready to sacrifice their life in her defence.

Heroes and Martyrs

Feminised images of the nation such as those of Bharat Mata relate to other gendered images of the nationalist symbolic repertoire. While Bharat Mata can be inscribed in narratives of the nation which encapsulate notions of purity and honour of the nation, images of martyrs and heroes evoke conceptions of strength, heroism and selflessness. In general, these ideal males were represented as heroic freedom fighters.

This aspect of nationalist symbolism is particularly evident in popular political prints. In the majority of the cases, these popular political prints are figural: they were portraits of nationalist leaders or of martyrs who sacrificed their life for India's freedom. Sometimes, calls to join the nationalist movement, or praise to the practice of *satyagraha* were included, but in general the portraits were drafted in praise of this or that nationalist martyr, or were aimed at representing, with images, concepts such as sacrifice, martyrdom, and nationalism. This is in contrast with the feminised imagery, which in its thematic and formal conception is more allegorical and symbolic than its male counterpart. In popular posters, women appeared less frequently than male characters, the only obvious exception being the image of Bharat Mata. Feminine icons such as Bharat Mata personify abstract ideas of freedom, honour, purity, justice and, of course, the nation, but they were hardly portraits of real characters.

The stress on the image mainly rested on its assumed auspiciousness and ultimately on the concept and practice of *darshan*, of mutual eye contact, which was an essential element of Hindu religious iconography. As in religious paintings the subjects usually looked straight out from the print, with very prominent eyes gazing directly at the onlooker. However, these nationalist posters differed from the purely religious ones in the way in which the subjects were depicted. While in the representation of Hindu gods and goddesses their divine status was indexed by their "supernatural" characteristics (usually graphically represented as having multiple body parts), political and nationalist posters used a different set of visual clues or iconographical markers to convey the necessary information. First of all, the subjects were depicted in a more naturalistic way: with one head, two arms, two legs and so on. Moreover, the posture as well as their characteristic personal attributes (clothing, headgear and colour codes) and the settings of the picture became important markers. Sometimes the subjects were depicted performing a characteristic deed of their life that supposedly the audience was familiar with. Although in general the prints were accompanied by illustrative captions that helped the viewers to identify the subjects (often same posters were printed in different languages, the most popular languages employed being Urdu, Hindi and English), the specific iconographies of the most popular characters became fixed early on. [Fig. 7 and Fig. 8].

Fig. 7 *Azad Mandir*

Fig. 8 Bhagat Singh

Iconographically the meaning of these prints is direct and the images seem to be simply commemorative. They are usually devoid of any subtler symbolic or allegoric message. Their aim is to illustrate patriotic martyrdom by representing an emblematic event in the life of some of the most popular nationalist heroes. There is usually only one plane of representation. Sometime the main portrait is surrounded by smaller portraits of other freedom fighters (such as *Aurobindo Mandir*, *Azad Mandir* and *Bhagat Singh on the Scaffold*)[29]. The poster *Azadi ke Divane*[30], depicting Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev[31]

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[29] British Library PP HinF83, PPHinF68 and EPP 1/12. The pictorial conception of this print rests on the idiom of popular prints. The synoptic arrangement of various portraits or episodes of a story around the man portrait is a typical representational technique of popular prints and of Vishnu in particular. According to this stylistic device a central image of Vishnu is depicted surrounded by his ten avatars, or incarnations.

[30] British Library PIB 9/33

[31] Bhagat Singh along with his two companions Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged in Lahore Central Jail in 1931. They were involved in what became known as the Lahore Conspiracy Case. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru killed the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Mr Saunders, in a terrorist attack. They originally planned to kill the Superintendent of Police Scott who fatally wounded Lala Lajpati Rai in a lathi charge in occasion of a peaceful demonstration against the

'hearing the sentence of death by hanging with pleasure', is illustrative. This black and white print shows the three freedom fighters – Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdeva – standing in a prison compound, receiving their death sentence from an army official who is accompanied by a young peon. This print is of a stark plainness and simplicity of meaning. It illustrates a selected episode of the life of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeva in an idiom that easily communicates the essential elements of the event. Apart from employing some visual metaphors that connote power – for instance the detailed background depicting the prison compound (that also set the stage of the story); the representation of an army officer in high uniform and polished boots (connoting power) and the written piece of paper bearing the death sentence that the army official hands to the three of Lahore (a clear symbol of British established authority) – this illustration makes use of a basic pictorial vocabulary[32]. Its simple language not only conveys immediacy of action but also aims at reaching clarity of visual comprehension. The freedom fighters are depicted in the usual stereotyped manner: Bhagat Singh with his khaki uniform and trademark trilby hat and moustache, Sukhdeva in shirt, shorts, and high socks and Rajguru wearing a different khaki uniform and black cap. Two of them are cross-armed and all of them are defiantly looking at the two military men standing opposite them. This is merely a vignette depicting a particular event in the life of Bhagat Singh and of his compatriots. In its simplicity of execution and straightforwardness of meaning this is reminiscent of visual story-telling techniques typical of India's traditional figurative arts, according to whose established visual idiom, episodes and events, drawn from the common epics and folk heritage are represented[33]. Just like the depiction of a

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Simon Commission in Lahore in 1928.

[32] There are several other prints similar to this one, not in content but in concept. See for instance *Mister Raj Guru, Sardar Bhagat Singh and Mister Sukhdev going to be hanged with pleasure* [British Library PP Hin F63 and PIB 27/7] and *Sardar Bhagat Singh aur uske mitrom ki phamsi* [PIBin F85 and PIB 8/31A].

[33] Indeed, the aesthetic that characterised these prints is typical of the nationalist period. What characterised the aesthetic of the nationalist movement was that "articulation of nationhood.... produced strategies of thinking the nation that were very different from those of Western Europe" [Sircar 1997:107]. Within the world of mass-produced popular imagery, the mythological and the mythical dominated and were opposed to the secular and rational of Western aesthetics. For Sircar [1997], this must be seen as part of the larger effort of constructing an aesthetics that was distinctly Indian. Moreover, this new aesthetics that viewed and rejected realism as a sign of colonialism and re-appropriated traditional and familiar ways of seeing worked also to erase class differences

particular episode extrapolated from the Ramayana is identifiable and understandable by the audience even without the support of the whole narrative structure, so the viewers and consumers of this particular illustration were able to locate and identify this episode in the life of Bhagat Singh without the use of any other visual support. These popular political prints were not simple vignettes or cameos commemorating the life and martyrdom of Indian freedom fighters, but they were also didactic in scope, aiming at educating about nationalism and the spirit of sacrifice for the nation. They contributed to the establishment of a pantheon of nationalist heroes, which would be further 'manipulated' by the post-colonial Indian state [see Chapter 3, 4 and 5].

Nationalist Songs and Slogans

Methods of mobilisation relied heavily on oral communication. In the previous pages we saw how during the Cow Protection Movement often messages were delivered by itinerant communication experts in the form of songs and ballads. Patriotic songs and slogans belong to those emotionally charged symbolic constructions that simultaneously perpetrate and reinforce the spirit of nationalism. However, as for other symbols, they are not simply colourful ornaments. Songs and slogans are usually part of more complex symbolic activities such as public rituals and processions and can raise powerful emotions. Indeed, the emotional state thus created can "influence people's perception of the political world" [Kertzer 1988:100]. There is indeed an exchange between the cognitive and emotional poles of rituals. For Turner [1974:56] it is this exchange that "makes desirable what is socially necessary by establishing a right relationship between involuntary sentiments and the requirements of social structure. People are induced to do what they must do." That is, a ritualised practice can create an emotional state that makes the message delivered emotionally compelling. Nationalist songs and slogans are those sensory devices that aim at affecting people's emotional state [Kertzer 1988] by channelling patriotic fervour.

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creating deep horizontal solidarities between the nationalist élites and the masses [Sircar 1997:109].

During the nationalist movement, patriotic songs and poems were seized in great numbers by the British police in India. Indeed, this collection make up one of the largest single category of printed material confiscated by the British [Barrier, 1974:270]. These songs were in the form of poems, simple songs (*sangit*), *alha* (ballads in traditional metre), *phag* (typical *Holi* songs), and also of *updesh* (sermons). The subject related by these songs and poems varies greatly. Topics such as the evils of colonialism, the plight of the poor, Hindu-Muslim unity, *satyagraha,* praise of non-cooperation and of non-violent methods, promotion of *swadeshi* and of the use of the spinning-wheel (*charkha*), were common as well as eulogies of nationalist leaders and martyrs (in particular in honour of Bhagat Singh and Gandhi).

The singing of songs, slogans and poetry was not simply part of a communication and mobilisation strategy. Bankim's poem *Vande Mataram*[34] beside contributing to the creation of a gendered imagery of the Indian nation, became maybe the most important patriotic song and a compelling symbol of nationalism capable of channelling powerful emotions, as demonstrated by the fact that many freedom fighters died with *Vande Mataram* on their lips [Majumdar 1965: 478], after the British authorities declared the singing of the song seditious and punishable even with jail [Bhattacharya 2003:61-63]. Indeed, patriotic songs and slogans were part of the tradition of protest and were regularly sung during processions, demonstrations and other public ceremonies creating unity and solidarity among the demonstrators. When the revolutionary Bhagat Singh was put to trial in 1929, he used the occasion as a platform of nationalist propaganda chanting slogans and singing patriotic songs to which other members of the public joined in, thus disrupting court procedures [Deol, 1969:69]. Similarly, when he and his companions (Sukhudev and Rajguru) were taken out of their cells to be executed they chanted slogans that were repeated by the other inmates [Deol 1969:88]. The singing of songs and slogans such as these served to create a symbolic unity among those who participated in the chanting[35]. A nationalist song is not simply a hymn but a representation of the country

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[34] For the full text of the song *Vande Mataram* see Appendix I.

[35] The execution of criminals is a highly symbolic ceremony itself. Bhagat Singh and his companions tried to disrupt the ceremonial order of their execution not only by chanting slogans

that helps define its sense of nationhood while creating solidarity and stirring the emotions. Indeed, *Vande Mataram* was "intimately connected with [the] struggle for freedom [...] the passion and poignancy of that struggle"[36].

As well as creating solidarity, songs and slogans can be also items of contention. In as much as *Vande Mataram* contributed to channel patriotic fervour, it also became a disputed hymn throughout the freedom movement. Its open Hindu connotations and *Anandamath's* controversial anti-Muslim overtones upset Muslims' sensibilities. Already in 1908 during his presidential address at the second session of the All-India Muslim League held in Amristar, Syed Ali Imam voiced the objections of the Muslim community to *Vande Mataram* for the first time, by suggesting that "under the cloak of nationalism Hindu nationalism [wa]s preached in India" and noticing the sectarian and communal character of the hymn [Noorani 1999:95]. But objections to the hymn by the Muslim community were not necessarily done on the grounds of the anti-Muslim connotations that tinged Bankim's novel *Anandmath*. Rather, the Muslims considered *Vande Mataram* a salutation to a specific Hindu goddess and objected to *Vande Mataram* stanzas that openly referred to the Mother as the Goddess Kali and Durga and invited the singer to bow at the feet of the deity, a thing considered offensive as Muslims do not as a rule practice idol worship.

In 1923, Moulana Mohamed Ali, who presided over that year's Congress session at Kakinada, objected to the singing of *Vande Mataram*. Indeed, the feeling persisted that *Vande Mataram* could spark anti-Muslim sentiment and during the 1937 Calcutta session a subcommittee consisting of Maulana Azad, Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose was

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but also by refusing to wear the customary black uniform that those who were being hung were supposed to wear. By doing this, they aimed at changing the meaning of this ritual and challenging the power relation in it inscribed by reclaiming their identity as freedom fighters (and not as ordinary criminals) and by signifying the undying character of the nationalist movement.

[36] Nehru's speech at the Constituent Assembly, Official Report on "Constituent Assembly Debates", third session; part I; Volume VI, August 9-31, 1948. See also the resolution passed at the Congress Working Committee which met in Calcutta in 1937 which recognised that *Vande Mataram* "became a symbol[s] of national resistance to British Imperialism [...] a slogan of power which inspired our people and a greeting which ever remind us of our struggle of national freedom". *Indian Annual Register* 1937, volume II, p.327.

appointed to settle the issue with the guidance of Rabindranath Tagore. According to the Committee, *Vande Mataram* was appropriate as part of *Anandmath* but inappropriate as a national anthem. On that occasion, the Congress accepted the Muslims' viewpoint and declared that only the first two stanzas of the hymn should be sung at Congress functions. The resolution of the Congress Working Committee of 1937 however did not subscribe to this view. Instead it pointed out that "the modern evolution of the use of the song as part of National life is of infinitely greater importance than its setting in a historical novel before the national movement had taken shape"[37].

The row over *Vande Mataram* was never fully settled and re-emerged when the Constituent Assembly had to decide on India's national anthem. As in 1937 a compromise was found. The Constituent Assembly decreed that *Jana Gana Mana* would be India's national anthem. However, *Vande Mataram* was recognised as India's national song carrying about the same status as the national anthem. The decision of the Constituent Assembly was apparently taken on the grounds that *Jana Gana Mana* was more suitable for band music. On the contrary *Vande Mataram* had too much *alap*[38], thus making the hymn more difficult to be sung in unison[39]. It is obvious that when the Constituent Assembly declared that India's national anthem would be *Jana Gana Mana,* instead *Vande Mataram,* the framers of the Indian constitution were inspired by the principles of democracy and secularism that informed the spirit of the time, and, wedded to the view that divisive symbols should be kept in abeyance. *Jana Gana Mana* was considered fit as a national anthem mostly because it was shorn of any religious connotations being simply a hymn to India's natural beauty[40].

The Nationalist Flag

Flags as well as slogans and songs are central to the organisation and the

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[37] *Indian Annual Register* 1937, volume II, p.327

[38] *Alap* is a spontaneous mode of singing, typical of South Asian classical music.

[39] For a definitive statement on the issue by the President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, see Constituent Assembly Debates, volume XII, January 24, 1950. For an exhaustive account of the controversy see Bhattacharya 2003.

[40] Another kind of controversy tainted *Jana Gana Mana* over whether the song was actually composed in honour of the British to welcome King George V in his visit to India for his coronation Durbar.

choreography of public rituals and demonstrations. A flag is not "simply a decorated cloth, but the embodiment of a nation" [Kertzer 1988:7]. The flag, as other symbolic constructs of group identity, is one of those symbols that help the definition of the boundaries of the community it represents. It does so through the visual codes it employs which reify notions of history and belonging. The fact that the design of the Indian national flag excited heated debates and that it changed several times is symptomatic of its complex symbolic significance. The ceremonial pomp that usually accompanied the hoisting of the nationalist flag (as well as the repressive measures employed by the British authorities) further corroborates this fact. Those ceremonies were aimed at consecrating and at conferring legitimacy to the new flag, while being statements of national sovereignty. In 1906 the flag was ceremonially consecrated on Boycott Day, a date that was observed to protest against the partition of Bengal, and was hoisted at the sound of hundred and one crackers [Ghosh nd.: 32-33]. Similarly, in 1931 the newly approved national flag was hoisted throughout India on recommendation of the Congress Working Committee. For the British authorities these were understood as rites of rebellion that challenged their legitimacy and power. Sometimes, the British did not take any action against the hoisting of the nationalist flag as it was feared that a British intervention would transform a localised ceremony into an issue of national proportion (as it happened in Jabalpur in 1923 when the permission to hoist the flag on the municipal building in honour of a visiting Congress deputation was refused by the British authorities). At any rate, it seems that the necessity to have a national flag was tantamount to donning an identity to the movement and several prominent nationalist leaders became involved in the process: Sister Nivedita, Annie Besant, Tilak, Savarkar, Gandhi, and Nehru [Singh n.d].

The design of the national flag changed over the years. At different times, different colours and symbols were chosen. The very first flag was designed by Sister Nivedita in 1906. It was red, square in shape, with a yellow *vajra* – the thunderbolt, one of Vishnu's weapons, but also an emblem of the Buddha – in the middle of it accompanied by the words *Vande Mataram* in Bengali script. In 1907, the flag that immediately followed this one was a tricolour. It had three broad bands: the top one was green, the middle band was

yellow; the bottom band was red. On the top band there were eight half-open lotuses in a line representing the eight Provinces of British India. On the middle bar *Vande Mataram* was inscribed in Devanagari script and on the bottom stripe there were the figures of the sun and of a crescent moon, symbols of Hinduism and Islam respectively. The Home Rule flag hoisted at the 1917 Congress session held in Calcutta was again very different. It had five red stripes alternated to four green ones, with seven stars depicted across the flag and denoting the *Saptarishi* constellation. A Union Jack was on the left upper quadrant towards the hoist, while a star and crescent moon were on the right upper quadrant.

The design of the flag was not obviously a straightforward affair. Given, as we had previously noted, that the flag is one of those symbolic devices that help drawing the symbolic boundaries of the community, the major obstacles encountered by the nationalist leadership derived from a difficulty in translating into symbolic form the identity of the nationalist movement. The inclusion or exclusion of certain emblems, the choice of a particular pattern and of specific colours were all extremely significant. It seems that it was the French tricolour, symbol of liberty, fraternity and equality that inspired/was behind its use in the nationalist flag [Singh n.d.:40]. But if it was the French revolutionary tradition that was symbolised by the tricolour, the inclusion of the Union Jack, as in the case of the Home Rule flag, symbolised a political compromise with the British crown as the Home Rule movement agitated not for complete independence from London but for dominion status.

The insertion of the slogan *Vande Mataram*, and of several other symbols (half-opened lotuses, star, sun and moon, and the *charkha*) was to signify distinct concepts of national identity. For instance, the eight half-opened lotuses in the 1907 *swadeshi* flag which stood for India's eight British provinces indicated that the imagined India of the Bengali insurrectionists did not extend beyond the British dominions[41], thus excluding almost two-thirds of the territory that we now identify with the Indian state. The symbols

[41] For some, the agitations against the partition of the Bengal province were not nationalist yet, but simply regional in character. There is also controversy on the number of lotuses: some say they were seven instead of eight [Singh n.d.:40].

of the sun – or star – and the crescent moon identified India's two major religious communities but ignored the Christians, the Parsis, the Sikhs and the Jews. The *charkha* – the spinning wheel – added in 1921, became a fundamental symbol of nationalism. Such was the symbolic importance of the spinning-wheel, that since 1921 the Indian nationalist flag had to be made solely of *khadi*, the hand-spun, hand-woven cloth symbol of India's self-reliance and independence.

The flag's colour symbolism was equally important. The different colours stood for India's main religious communities and their representation on the flag meant primarily to signify the unity of all Indians. Green, red, orange, yellow, saffron and white were all used at different times. Green was generally understood as the colour sacred to the Muslims and red as the colour sacred to the Hindus. Thus, the Home Rule flag, which alternated red and green bands, denoted solidarity between India's two largest religious communities[42]. However, this colour symbolism (which was maintained in a preliminary design of the 1921 flag) was not completely satisfactory and on Gandhi's suggestion the colour white was added for the flag background should also represent India's other religious communities [Singh n.d.].

It was not just the colour symbolism that was significant. Even the colour hierarchy was meaningful. According to Gandhi, the arrangement of the three colour bands meant to symbolise the protection of India's religious minorities: "the weakest numerically occupy the first place, the Islamic colour (green) comes next, the Hindu colour (red) comes last, the idea being that the strongest should act as a shield to the weakest ... And to represent the equality with the least of us with the best, an equal part is assigned to all the three colours in the design" [Gandhi 1921]. The colour symbology of the Indian national flag was again significantly altered in 1931. By 1930 several people had expressed their unhappiness with flag's colour scheme and its communal associations[43].

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[42] According to Sumiti Kumar Chatterjee [in Singh n.d.] who wrote an article on the nationalist flag on the *Modern Review* in 1931, the communal interpretation of the flag's colour palette was only relevant after 1920s. To his interpretation then, the green and red stood respectively for life and hope, and blood and sacrifice.

[43] Chatterjee [1931 cited in Singh n.d.] thought that the communal character of the flag colour code

Others pressed for the inclusion of the saffron, the colour of the Sikhs but also the colour that "typified the spirit of renunciation, and was a colour which symbolised an ideal common to the Hindu Yogi and Sannyasi as well as to the Muslim Faquir and Darwesh" [Chatterjee 1931 in Singh n.d.:70].

What was once considered a national symbol of unity and harmony of all religious communities of India (the three colours representing the distinct faiths of India), with the passing of time and the radicalisation and polarisation of the nationalist movement, came to be interpreted as a symbol of division and communalism. With regard to the character of the early nationalist movement Pandey points to the fact that at the turn of the century there were already signs of the affirmation of "a vision of society as already formed of discrete communities, each with its own priorities and interests and each with the right to determine its own ('social') future: 'India' was 'Hindu' + 'Muslim' + 'Sikh' + 'Christian', etc ..." [Pandey 1990:231]. The pre-1931 Congress flag, where the colours meant to symbolise India's discrete religious communities and the flag itself was a summa of them but not their synthesis, significantly replicated these ideals.

It was only in 1931, after the installation of a Congress Flag Committee[44] that it was decided to strip the flag of any communal representation when it became necessary to identify a new symbology for the same pictorial referents. After a year of deliberation the Flag Committee reached the unanimous agreement that the national flag:

> "should be of a single colour except for the colour of the device. If there is one colour that is more acceptable to India as a whole, even as it is more distinctive than another one that is associated with this ancient country by long tradition it is the *kesari* or saffron colour. Accordingly, it is felt that the flag should be of *kesari* colour" [in Singh n.d.:75].

However, the Congress Working Committee that met in Bombay in August 1931,

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was as evil as the establishment of communal electorates.

[44] The Flag Committee was appointed by the Congress Working Committee at its Karachi meeting on April 2 1931. The Committee comprised: B Pattabhi Sitaramayya as convenor, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhabhai Patel, Abul Kalam Azad, Tara Singh, N S Hardikar and D B Kalekar.

did not approve the new recommended design and insisted in keeping the new flag as close as possible to the original design. The new agreed design for the nationalist flag was only slightly changed from the previous pattern. In fact, the national flag had still three broad colour bands (saffron, white and green) with a spinning wheel at the centre. But it was the meaning of the colour symbolism that was altered:

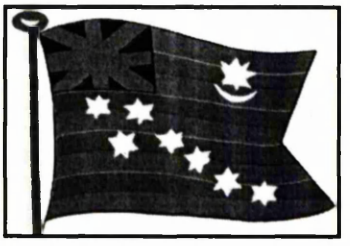
> "It is being understood that the colours have no communal significance, but that saffron shall represent courage and sacrifice, white peace and truth, green faith and chivalry, and the wheel shall represent the hope of the masses."[45]

Once again the Indian national flag defined the character of the Indian nation, representing the spirit of the nation, its commitment to *swaraj*, and India's tradition of synthesis. [Fig. 9]

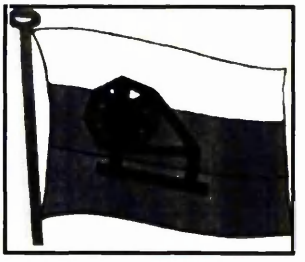
India's Flags

Sister Nivedita

1906 Flag



1916 Home Rule Flag



1921 Congress Flag

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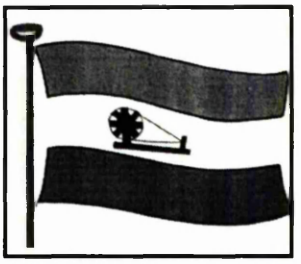
[45] *The Times of India*, August 6, 1931, p. 10



1931 Congress Flag

1947 India's National Flag

Clothing the Nationalist Movement.

On August 18 1923 a peaceful procession of *satyagrahis* marched through the street of Nagpur led by Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad to restore the "honour of our flag and our right to hold public processions" [Tahmankar 1970:71]. No slogans where raised, and no songs sung. In this silent rite of rebellion and resistance to authority the message was carried by two symbolic elements that were louder than words: the national flag and the Gandhi cap. In the previous section it was shown how the national flag was a powerful visual sign of political orientation. Here, I want to show how clothes can objectify a sense of identity and belonging to a particular group. The Gandhi cap and the wearing of *khadi*, the hand-spun and hand-woven fabric, became such symbols.

The quest for a national costume emerged early in the nationalist movement. As we know, a nation is represented and its identity defined through symbols and symbolic practices, which are aimed at differentiating its members from strangers. A uniform, a dress code, is a visual mark of belonging and a concrete symbol to which everybody can relate. Indeed belonging to a group only happens through symbolic actions [Kertzer 1988], and wearing specific clothes is one of these symbolic practices. Tarlo [1996:319], quoting Bourdieu [1984], speaks of 'strategies of distinctions'. The identification and creation of a national dress code is extremely important to transmit notions of identity and to represent the cohesiveness of a group. A uniform is an iconic marker permitting visibility that strengthens a sense of belonging. A uniform defines social differences: it makes the people who wear it feel they belong to a particular group and makes them

appear to others as belonging to the same group. Therefore, besides being a sign of distinction, a uniform is also a symbol of unity. It is an identifier that aims at submerging individual identities to that of the overarching group [Kertzer 1988].

In colonial India, both the British and the Indians were engaged in these symbolic practices of identification through clothing. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British tightened their sartorial codes to distinguish themselves from the educated Indians who had taken up wearing European styles of dress and following western life-styles. Roughly around the same time that a desire to differentiate themselves emerged among the British, Indian nationalism passed from a phase of acute westernisation and rejection of all things Indian, to a phase of revaluation of traditions. They did so in a ritual fashion by creating a new national style. Whereas at the beginning, Indianness was expressed by the choice of a particular sartorial style (rejection of European style for adoption of Indian dress style) as a sign of patriotism [Tarlo 1996:117], with the emergence of the *swadeshi* movement and of Gandhi's mass politics, Indian identity came to be represented also through the materials and the choice of *swadeshi* fabric, in particular through the choice of hand-spun, hand-woven *khadi*. The choice of clothing as a visual sign of political orientation is particularly significant in India. While clothing in general helps to distinguish people from one another socially, culturally and physically, in India it also had other important functions. Bayly [1986] identifies three main functions of clothes in India. Firstly, clothes are symbols of status and can also record change of status. Secondly, traditionally clothing in India is endowed with a transformative power: clothes can change not only the physical but also the moral character of the wearer. Lastly, clothes can be a pledge of future protection. Moreover, according to Cohn [1989:313], in India clothes were linked to the nature of authority. They were not simple metaphors of power but authority itself, as power could be transmitted through clothing. Both Cohn [1989] and Bayly [1986] must be kept in mind when dealing with the nationalist use of clothes as a sign of patriotism. According to Bayly [1986], it was the use by the nationalist leadership and in particular by Gandhi of these symbolic notions of clothing that made *khadi* a powerful symbol of nationalism. As early as 1870s in Bengal it emerged a desire to provide for a redefinition of Indianness through clothing that "could bring about a sense

of political unity" [Tarlo 1996:59]. The boycott of British goods, the change of lifestyle, and the bonfires of western clothes became central symbolic forms of protest[46] of Indian nationalism since the emergence of the *swadeshi* movement[47].

The *swadeshi* movement aimed at encouraging the development and the use of indigenous goods through the boycott of European manufactures. According to Bayly the promotion of *swadeshi* industries and the boycott of foreign goods were concepts that were intimately interwoven with "notions of neighborliness, patriotism, purity and sacrifice, all of which provided unifying ideologies more powerful than any single call for political representation or independence" [Bayly 1986:285]. Moreover, the boycott of foreign cloth fell easily within notions of cessation of cooperation and of civil disobedience that were the most common traditional forms of protest in pre-colonial India [Dharampal 1971].

During the *swadeshi* movement, the *dhoti* (a man's waistcloth) became a visible sign of protest against British policies and an excellent vehicle for the expression of patriotic sentiments. It became "the ultimate symbol of *swadeshi*" [Tarlo 1996:60] and of allegiance to the Indian people: "Bengali High Court judges, barristers, solicitors, noblemen, merchants, have all discarded English costume" [48]. Through the employment of a

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[46] According to Deshpande [2003], *swadeshi* had also the merit of bringing a nationalist consciousness to the marketplace. By investing a number of ordinary objects with nationalist connotations, *swadeshi* transformed everyday items into symbolic aids for imagining the nation.

[47] The *swadeshi* movement was born in Bengal at the beginning of the twentieth century and peaked during the agitation against the partition of Bengal of 1905. Widespread unrest and boycott of British goods characterised the anti-partition movement. This movement criticised the British government's policies of destitution of India's manufactures, as well as its oppressive revenue policies, which were believed to contribute to the misery of the Indian masses. Indeed, the decline in production of Indian fine cotton textiles depended on a web of reason. Besides the impact of cheap European imports mainly from Britain and Germany, a change of taste among Indians was an equally determining factor [Bayly 1986 and Cohn 1989]. Also, imported textiles were compatible with local and cultural preferences [Bayly 1986:308]. Moreover, modernity partly transformed the value of clothes when clothes became markers of cultural change. Indeed, wearing European clothes was a visible sign of modernity and respectability, whereas donning Indian clothes was a symptom of backwardness. Other factors that contributed to the growth of foreign textile imports, were the improvement of communication infrastructures that reduced the costs of distribution and contributed to the opening up of new markets and the increase of the cost of labour in India that made Lancashire textiles more competitive [Bayly 1986:308].

[48] Motilal Nehru, Letter 16 November, 1905. In Kumar [1982:91]

traditional form of dress, the people of Calcutta performed a highly symbolic action, which became a perpetual reminder of one's allegiances. This was a very regional affair and although the *dhoti* became a symbol of *swadeshi*, patriotism and anti-British sentiment, it was not conceived as a uniform. However it did provide a vehicle for the expression of the ideals of the anti-partition movement and for the promotion of *swadeshi* policies. It was more a visual stratagem, a visual sign of dissent, rather than an attempt to give the people of India a nationalist uniform.

When Gandhi became the leader of the Indian nationalist movement things radically changed not only in the political objectives of the movement, but also with respect to the symbolism of clothing. Gandhi appropriated the ideas and the methods of the *swadeshi* movement and, by the first non-cooperation movement [1920-1921] the use of hand-spun, hand-woven *khadi* and the Gandhi cap were widely used [Cohn 1989:344]. It seems that Gandhi was always preoccupied with clothing as a means of signification. Bean [1989] portrays Gandhi as a semiotician who communicated with clothes. According to Bean, Gandhi, after having experimented with different dress styles, by finally donning a short *dhoti*[49] successfully communicated to the Indian masses the values and ideals of the nationalist movement[50]. But if during the anti-partition movement in Bengal it was the choice of sartorial style that became a sign of patriotism, with Gandhi it was both the style and the fabric [hand-spun and hand-woven *khadi*] that became visible symbols of nationalism, *swadeshi* and *swaraj*. For Gandhi, the spinning, weaving and wearing of *khadi* was the panacea against India's growing impoverishment. "The Indian people would be free from European domination both politically and economically when the masses took to spinning, weaving and wearing home-spun cloth, *khadi*". [Gandhi in Cohn 1989:343]

The import of cheaper, mill-woven fabrics from the Lancashire mills dealt a death

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[49] Gandhi's short *dhoti* was usually referred to as loincloth or as a *langoti*. However, as Tarlo notes "[I]t was in fact much longer than either term suggest and could more accurately be called a short *dhoti*" [Tarlo 1996:71].

[50] According to Parel (1969) *khadi*, fasting, the cow and *Harijan* were Gandhi's most prominent symbols that he used to "promote his political values, and to aid in the practice of the Gandhian virtues" [Parel 1969:515].

blow to India's cottage industry and was considered to be the cause of much of India's poverty. It is not a surprise therefore that *khadi* emerged as the symbolic alternative to foreign mill-cloth. The hand-spun, hand-woven *khadi* became a symbol of India's economic drain, of its poverty, of anti-Britishness but also of rediscovering of indigenous values and traditions, of self-sufficiency, and eventually of independence. Gandhi's adoption of a short *dhoti* was an extreme example of using cloth as a signifying practice. Gandhi's own uniform acquired a variety of meanings. The *dhoti* was a symbol of closeness to the cause of the poor. It was a visual exposure of India's poverty, of its lack of clothing, one of the most basic necessities. However, Gandhi's *dhoti* signified not only India's economic predicament but indicated also its solution. Indeed, the short *dhoti* was a symbol of Gandhi's economic programme for the resurgence of India's *swadeshi* industry[51]. Gandhi not only tried to communicate with the masses through the means of cloth (as in the case of *dhoti*) but he also actively participated in the creation of a 'uniform' for the nationalist movement. Aware as he was of the power of dress to signify status and political belief, Gandhi envisaged the typical uniform in a loose shirt, dhoti or pyjama trousers and a cap, all made out of hand-spun, hand-woven coarse *khadi*.

But for these symbols to be successful, they had to be adopted by vast number of people otherwise the signifying power of this symbolic practices was lost. Gandhi set up a number of organisations and societies for the promotion of *khadi*. He pushed for the institutions of educational schemes in schools and through exhibitions. Boycotts of foreign goods, picketing outside shops that sold European imports, bonfires[52], door to door collections of foreign clothes were all resorted to in order to popularise the use of khadi

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[51] A further signification of Gandhi's loincloth was it being a symbol of saintliness. Gandhi's entire non-verbal idiom was steeped in the Hindu tradition of ascetism. Indeed, for Van der Veer [1994:94] "Gandhi's success. ...depended on his use of Hindu devotional discourse". Beside his visual appearance that was reminiscent of that of the wandering ascetics, Gandhi's own discourse of social transformation – *satyagraha* – was derived from the Hindu traditional discourse of asceticism, according to which power [*shakti*] results from *practices* of *tapas* [austerity] and *brahmacarya* [celibacy]. However, according to Tarlo [1996:79] Gandhi categorically refused this interpretation.

[52] Bonfires of foreign clothes were more than a means to dramatize one's political position as they became symbolic rites of rebellion as what is burning is "an object that represent the enemy" [Kertzer 1988:121]. Moreover, bonfires "provided a means to unifying opponents of government policy [..] in the absence of strong organizational structure."[Kertzer 1988:122]

and of Indian style of dress. Indeed, Gandhi insisted also on the transformative power of *khadi* [Bayly 1986:314] and *khadi* became the ultimate expression of moral duty to the nation and a question of *dharma*. According to Bayly [1986], Gandhi weaved his arguments for the promotion of *khadi* on traditional notions regarding the religious and magical aspect of cloth, spinning and wearing of *khadi*. In particular, Gandhi regarded spinning as "an act of prayer (mantra), both a purgation of individual sin and a creation of new life in the spinner and in the community" [Bayly 1986:313]. Indeed, the spinning and weaving of *khadi* could "transform the moral fibre of the nation" [Bayly 1986:312]. By 1920, all Congress members were required to spin at least half an hour a day [Tarlo 1996:87] and for a while, having spun a certain amount of yarn was a necessary condition to access some offices within Congress [Bayly 1986:313]. This great stress on spinning gave the *charkha*, the spinning wheel, a prominent place in the symbolic repertoire of the nationalist movement and in the national flag [see above]. However, because *khadi* could be particularly coarse, it presented several problems as many were not entirely happy to convert to *khadi* and discard their cheap, but fine imported clothes. And often, despite *khadi* being a fabric of unity, it could also express social or religious differences which were came to be "expressed in the fineness of the *khadi*, the types of fibres used, the colour, the decoration and of course the style in which the *khadi* was worn" [Tarlo 1996:104].

Beside the adoption of a uniform of loose shirt and pijama bottoms, the cap – that came to be known simply as the Gandhi cap – became probably the more versatile symbol of nationalism. The cap was another one of Gandhi's deliberate creations[53]. Gandhi was aware of the significance of headgear as a signifier of social, religious and regional identification in India, as he was particularly conscious of the power of creating a practical and economical visual symbol of subversion and of nationalism [Tarlo 1986:83] – "... a visible mark of swadeshi and swaraj" [CWMG, vol. 21: 507] – that could transcend people's differences (social and economical) and obtain a level of visual uniformity [CWMG, vol. 20:386]. By the time India experienced the first non-cooperation movement

[53] Emma Tarlo [1096:82-83] reports a little-known conversation between Gandhi and his friend Kakasahib with regards to the necessity of finding a suitable national cap.

[1920-1921] the Gandhi cap had already become an essential part of the Congress uniform [Cohn 1989:344]. It was easily made and ready available at all major political meetings, so much so that by "1920 substantial numbers of the Indian male population were wearing it" [Tarlo 1996:84]. [Fig.10 and Fig. 11]

Fig. 10 Fig. 10 Bharat Mata Blessing Gandhi and *Khadi*

Fig. 11 Quit India Procession

Clothes objectify self and group identities. They are also means of integration as wearing a particular outfit signify unity also in the absence of consensus. In India, the spinning and wearing of *khadi* and of the Gandhi cap beside symbolising national identity and transmitting the values and beliefs of the nationalist movement were also a challenge to British authority who looked upon these symbols with growing anxiety. Emma Tarlo [1996] questions if Gandhi rediscovered or invented a symbolism of cloth and dress and if the meanings of this symbolic repertoire were fixed. Gandhi did both, for as Smith has contended:

> "what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbols, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges." [Smith, 1999:9]

This is where Gandhi's strength lay.

Public Ceremonies

During the nationalist movement political struggle was also fought through public ceremonies: *satyagrahas*, boycotts, *hartals*, non-cooperation and civil disobedience activities, bonfires of foreign cloths, funerals of nationalists heroes, public processions and demonstrations, the act of spinning, and even Gandhi's daily prayers. Indeed the whole nationalist movement was built on rituals. In the previous chapter it was noted that political rituals cover four major functions [Kertzer, 1996:125]: they help define the movement; confer political legitimacy on its sponsors and on its participants (while de-legitimising the established political order), create solidarity among the participants and lastly, encourage the construction of a particular political reality. Most importantly rituals played a significant role in informing and constructing a sense of collectivity [Edensor, 2001:69] across boundaries irrespective of caste, class, regional and religion divisions. Public ceremonies and rituals of any kind (religious, pagan, civic and political) are powerful instruments of integration, dramatic expressions of the values shared by the community, and formidable vehicles for the exercise of power. Rituals offer unique occasions to assemble large crowds and to represent in highly compelling dramatic form the legitimating ideas of power [be it religious or political] through the employment of powerful symbols. Flags were displayed, songs sung, slogans are raised, and images of the leaders are paraded. Moreover, the performative potential of ritual rests on their capacity to 'enact' the nation as they allow for statements about the nation to be played out in the nation-space [Kaur 1998:296].

Partly, nationalist public ceremonies found inspiration in India's traditional ritual culture. In India, traditions of public ceremonies focussed on three main areas: political, religious, and civic [Freitag 2001]. Of these three, the first two had a more elaborate ritual culture than the third, which gained greater importance only with the development of India's civic society and the impact of British rule. In India there was a complex and varied tradition of public and collective activities of all sorts. Freitag [1989]'s distinction among different types of collective activities can be helpful here. Freitag [1989]

distinguishes between three types of public activities: public performances, usually cultural activities such as street theatre, musical performances, recitations, and exegesis of religious texts; collective ceremonies, usually religious processions; and finally collective forms of protest. Collective public ceremonies – the ones that interest us here – became ideal spaces for confrontation, competition and arenas for the establishment of power relations.[54] This was due to their intrinsic character of being symbolic and dramatic expression of power relations in the community and of community identity and solidarity[55]. It is from this tradition that the nationalist movement took inspiration.

Political ritual culture found expression in an elaborated Indo-Islamic courtly culture where

> "[V]ision and the exercise of the gaze became connected to royalty. [...] The exercise of vision [...] had a transactional quality: power was both reinforced and acceded and, in the process, partaken of; goods [...] were exchanged; the exercise of the gaze became part of an integrative ceremonial process embedded with meaning" [Freitag, 2001:41].

Power too, was represented visually through the development of elaborate architectural styles, the patronage of religious buildings and other secular ceremonies, which became visual expressions of power in themselves. Indian rulers of any period have always understood the role and the importance of the ritual and established elaborated ceremonies (such as durbars, coronations, and so on) that became elaborate public expressions of power and displays of authority. For instance, the *jharokha-i-darśan*[56],

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[54] Freitag calls them areas of re-negotiation of power, because it was in these public spaces that communities were redefined through collective activities [1989:6].

[55] Freitag [1989] notes how Hindu and Muslim collective ceremonies although similar on the outlook, differed in several aspects. Hindu festivals were predominantly joyous, laud, colourful seasonal celebration overwhelmingly public in characters. On the other hand, Muslim ceremonies were mostly occasions for self-denial and mourning and in general private in nature expect for the public processional aspect of Muharram.

[56] The *jharokha-i-darshan* was part of a very elaborated court ritual established by Akbar to improve the smooth running of the state. Accordingly, the emperor was to appear in public three times every day. The *jharokha-i-darshan*, performed usually in the morning after sunrise, was the ruler's first public appearance. This ceremony was both a performance of darśan in the strict Hindu ritualistic sense (i.e. whereby the emperor showed himself to his subject to be seen and to see) and

instituted by Akbar himself, combined state ceremonial with the Hindu religious ritual practice of *darśan* aiming at constructing ritual-symbolic idioms through which and with which Mughal rulers could effectively represent authority to the Indians.

Besides rituals of authority, religious practices and religious festivals were possibly the most popular form of expression of culture and identity. Then, as it is now, the year was broken by a string of occasions for celebration. Religious and pagan festivals often took the form of largely attended public affairs – by Muslim and Hindu alike – and in general involved all levels of the community. The Indian masses were also accustomed to a series of dramatic and symbolic representations of the community, of its values and belief systems via popular religious festivals, which used an array of visual aids and stimuli and were accompanied by other visually engaging cultural performances.

Indigenous political culture allowed space for resistance of authority and made the populace aware of this power. Moreover, good communication infrastructures ensured the free flow of information. These elements (ways of expression of power, expressions of community solidarity and identity, and well-established communication infrastructures) became useful during the nationalist movement notwithstanding the increasing power of modern means of communications and the influence of modern technologies and ways of thinking Tarlo [1996:86] describes Gandhi as "the master of symbolism" and indeed his political style relied heavily on the use of symbolic and ritual activities. Gandhi's strength lay not only on his personal charisma and his capacity of pioneering new ritual and symbolic systems of communication, but also on his ability of using pre-existing symbolic constructions, and employing "a conceptual language within which members of pre-existing ethnic, linguistic or political communities could express a sense of their collective being" [Cubitt, 1988:2]. With Gandhi, public meetings resembled religious congregations of pilgrims or believers and were imbued with sacred symbolism. Often *kirtans* (hymns)

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a form of open public durbar that allowed the people to have direct access to the ruler. In keeping with the Hindu ritual tradition, the emperor showed himself from the balcony or a window of his palace to "give darśan", to present himself to the subjects and also to give the public a chance to appear before him.

written in the style of traditional devotional songs were sung by the attendees before the speeches were given while conch shells were blown to call public meetings and demand the audience attention.

Here, I would like to draw once again on Gandhi's symbolic idiom and show how this language provided a platform where the nation was staged and a sense of collectivity built. To illustrate these points, I take into consideration Gandhi's salt march. On 12 March 1930 Gandhi set off on a 240-miles march with the intention of making salt from the sea on his arrival. The intention of his march was at the same time simple and ingenious. The British monopoly on the salt tax in India dictated that the sale or production of salt by anyone but the British government was a criminal offence punishable by law [Ashe 1968:301]. Gandhi chose the salt tax as the focal point of his *satyagraha* because it was a symbol of British injustice and because in its simplicity it was also an item to which anybody could relate. With regard to this, Tarlo [1996:85] points out how Gandhi's choice of 'innocent objects' as political symbols was indeed very shrewd as this would inevitably portray any attempt by the British authorities to suppress them extremely disproportionate. In the twenty-three days that took Gandhi and his party of trusted volunteers to go from Sabarmati to Dandi, the march stopped at one village in the morning and at another in the evening. Whenever he stopped, Gandhi took the opportunity to preach and educated the masses on the meaning of *satyagraha* and on the goal of the nationalist movement, spreading the message of *swaraj* and giving instructions for the non-cooperation campaign that he had set in motion. Crowds thronged the villages where the march stopped and lined up the route where it passed showering the *satyagrahis* with flowers, coins, currency notes, and *kum kum*[57]. When Gandhi eventually reached Dandi, he boiled salt out of the seawater ceremonially breaking the salt laws, and exclaimed: "With this, I am shaking the foundation of the British Empire". He vigorously advised people to make salt freely as the "ancestors used to" and when not engaged in this work to actively devote themselves to a vigorous propaganda for the boycott of foreign cloth and the use of *khadi*. The day when the salt laws were broken began a week

[57] *The Tribune*, 14 March 1930

of non-cooperation and civil disobedience throughout the country. Salt laws were broken by five million people at over five thousand meetings. By the end of April the British had incarcerated over sixty thousands protesters. Gandhi himself was eventually arrested on 4 May.

Gandhi's salt march was a powerful rite of resistance, which provided the basis for the delegitimation of British colonial power. Moreover the march was an excellent means of mass mobilisation. His daily prayers and meetings, his interviews with the national press and his writings for *Young India* and *Navajivan,* which he compiled regularly, contributed to make the masses aware of *swaraj,* and of the goals of the nationalist movement. The *Dandi* march was also particularly effective in creating a sense of collectivity and solidarity. It did so in two ways. In a more superficial way, this was achieved by the participation in the march by a large number of people that created the impression of belonging to a larger community. However, the same effect was accomplished by the organisation of simultaneous rites of civil disobedience that were carried out in a number of places around the country. The participation in similar acts of protest throughout the country at the same time contributed to the feeling of a sense of national unity and of solidarity. Despite a lack of national coordination, scattered Congress party headquarters still managed to make Indians feel part of the same political force by the enactment of the same symbolic actions which involved demonstrations, boycotts, salt-making, courting arrest, various means of non-violent protest and which incorporated common slogans, songs and uniforms. By staging similar rituals at the same time "different groups asserted their identity as part of a larger association" [Kertzer 1988:24].

Gandhi was not the only one who made use of traditional public ceremonies and pioneered novel ritual forms. Before him, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the leader of the extremists, recognised the importance of using popular, familiar and established ceremonies and traditions to introduce political messages to the masses. His intentions were to use a popular religious festival for the dissemination of political ideas among the uneducated urban and rural masses.

> "Why shouldn't we convert the large religious festivals into mass political rallies? Will it not be possible for political activities to enter the humblest cottages of the villages through such means? Will it not be possible to make available to our illiterate countrymen in the villages the moral and religious education which you [the educated people] have obtained after strenuous efforts" [*Kesari*, September 8, 1896, cited in Cashman 1975:79]

Tilak assiduously campaigned for the revival of two important festivals: the Ganapati *utsava* and the Shivaji festival. In the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals case, Tilak surely and consciously picked two of the most popular characters, among the reservoir of shared myths and symbols, to bring the people together. Beside being excellent vehicles for the dissemination of political ideas, it was festivals like these that could "prove an incentive to the legitimate ambitions of a people with a great historic past... They are an antidote to vague despair. They serve like manure to the seeds of enthusiasm and the spirit of nationality" [Tilak quoted in Ghose, 1922:70].

The politicisation of a religious festival and of religious symbols in India was quite problematic as it could exacerbate the delicate balance of intercommunal relations. Although in general nationalist leaders were committed to secularism, "many (...) believed that religion could serve a political purpose". [Cashman, 1970:347]. The rationale behind it was that tradition – in this case Hindu religious tradition – could become an effective means for spreading national culture and create a sense of national identity, thus partly encouraging the propagation of modernity. On the contrary, the use of the Ganapati festival succeeded only to a certain extent in spreading the ideas of the Congress. By the turn of the century, it certainly managed to alienate other religious communities and the secular-minded people [Basu et al 1993:4 and Cashman 1970]. Forms of protest of the Indian nationalist movement were not only codified through official ceremonies but were also enacted through spontaneous public rituals. Funerals of freedom fighters were such rituals and became powerful political device of opposition. Kertzer invites us to see these forms of national protest not simply as a safety valve whose performance was allowed by the regime to allow people to express their anger. On the contrary,

> "[I]n the absence of pre-existing forms of national political organization, and

> given the government's repression of more direct attempts to organize such national protest, much less revolt, the funerals allow a national leadership to arise, and they create a common identity, building a broader antigovernment solidarity. They also help create an alternative conception of a future political universe, and they instil strong emotions of resistance to the government."[Kertzer 1988:171-172]

The public funeral of Jatindra Nath Das, one of Bhagat Singh's comrades in the Lahore Conspiracy case, was such an occasion. Jatindra Nath Das, who had joined Bhagat Singh in his hunger strike to demand better facilities in jail[58], died in September 1929. Upon his request[59] his body was paraded through the streets of Lahore before being taken back to Calcutta. The procession headed by prominent nationalist leaders, snaked its way through Lahore's symbolic centres – Lytton Road, Anarkali, Lahore Gate, Papar Mandi, Macchi Hatta, Rang Mahal, Dabbi Bazar and old Kotwali. It reached Delhi Gate in the early evening and there a well-attended public meeting was held where rich tributes were paid in honour of Das. The body was then taken to the Naulakha police station were it was placed in a coffin and then carried to the railway station – where thousands of people had already gathered – for its last journey to Calcutta[60]. Although being an impromptu public ritual, Das' funeral was nevertheless an important public ceremony of resistance to authority and a public statement of national identity. Das wanted to die not as a Bengali but as an Indian [Deol 1969:65] and his civic funeral ceremony – as a temporary takeover of the city of Lahore – was a symbolical enactment of the Indian nation.

In sum, public rituals were powerful symbolic strategies of the Indian nationalist movement. Whilst in their participative nature they allowed for a spirit of unity and communion to arise, public rituals were also formidable means of political agitation and

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[58] Bhagat Singh's demands were: "1. special diet (including milk, ghee, rice, curd, etc).2.No forcible labour. 3. Toilet requisites (soap, oil, shaving-kit etc). 4. Literature of all kinds (history, economics, political science, poetry, drama, fiction, newspapers, etc.)." [Home Department (Political), Government of India, 1930, File no. 244 K.W. 1959 and *Imperial Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. IV, no. 9. Move for Adjournment Speech of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, page 3. Cited in Deol [1969].

[59] Apparently before dying Dass expressed his desire that his funerals be not in the "orthodox Bengali fashion" [Deol 1969:65].

[60] This account is based on Deol [1969].

anti-colonial resistance.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I focused on the symbolic code of the nationalist movement in pre-independent India. It was noted that the importance of symbolic constructs depended primarily on their being necessary means not only for the imagination of the nation but also as instruments of anti-colonial resistance and mobilisation. The main point arising from this chapter is that the appeal of the symbolic idiom of Indian nationalism hinged on pre-existing modes of expression and of resistance to authority. Another notable point that was made and which is strictly related to the previous one was that this symbolic repertoire was also characterised by the presence of potentially divisive symbols. This tendency to divisiveness usually on the lines of religious traditions was furthermore exacerbated by the widespread belief amongst the leaders of the necessity of using religious symbols to mobilise the masses[61]. This instrumental theory of nationalism rests upon the belief that ethnic and national identities are tools in the hands of the elites struggling among each others for political power and control of economic resources [Brass, 1991:15]. It was eventually established that symbolic national constructions are partly retrieved from existing ethnic traditions and partly fabricated, manipulated or simply re-adapted by the nationalist elites.

On the whole the character of the nationalist symbolism was mostly traditional: the nationalist movement employed a familiar repertoire of images and of style of representations. However, while the formats were traditional, the content was novel and the familiar imagery was often charged with new meanings. Gandhi's symbolic idiom epitomised this synthesis. This vibrant and lively tradition, which used the vocabulary and grammar of popular idioms, was to be largely discarded with the coming of independence. A new national symbolic language, shorn of its religious connotations and also of its vitality, was to dominate India's post-colonial history.

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[61] With regards to Tilak's Ganapati *utsav* and Shivaji's festivals, Kaur [2003] contends that this tendency partly derived also from the necessity of propagating political ideas without incurring British censorship. Because of the British policy of non interference in religious affairs, such festivals were ideal means for the propagation of the nationalist cause.

CHAPTER 3

Creating Unity, Creating Indianness

The previous chapter focussed on the symbolic constructions of the nationalist movement both as tools for the imagination of the emerging Indian nation and of resistance to authority. It was noted how the symbolic repertoire that emerged was constituted by a familiar inventory of images and representations that rested on pre-colonial indigenous modes of expression and resistance and was steeped in dominant religious idioms. This chapter will look at the ways in which, at the time of independence, the Indian nation was made visible through a sum of new symbolic forms and official narratives. In this chapter I will argue that independence brought a series of changes to the symbolic articulations of the narratives of national identity. First, the symbolic repertoire of independent India was not an instrument of resistance to authority. On the contrary, it was a tool for the support of the existing regime. Indeed, independence and, most importantly, the creation of a new state required a consistent and legitimating symbolical apparatus capable of instilling a feeling of unity and of national identity. For the first time, the state maintained official control over the imagery of nationhood, which resulted in a much more coordinated and bureaucratically complex propaganda[1] machine. Second, the symbolic repertoire was part of a strategy aimed at *educating* the masses in their new role as citizens of independent India. The instructional purpose of the repertoire was a reflection of the belief in the task of the political élites not just to administrate the independent state but also to educate. The need to persuade and motivate, communicate ideals, knowledge and skills was a direct consequence of the

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[1] Here propaganda is not intended as indoctrination and manipulation but it is primarily seen as a way of making people aware of the state and encouraging participation in the affairs of the nation. It is with these arguments and provisos in mind that I continue to use the term propaganda in this chapter as a convenient means with which to describe this type of state activity.

first phase of development that saw the passage from tradition to modernity via industrialisation, urbanisation and westernisation, when the emphasis was on the need for radical change of the social structure and on individuals' attitudes and behaviour.

Thematically, the repertoire reflected the dominant ideology of post-independent India. Themes of modernisation, progress, industrialisation, reform, scientific advance, secularism, egalitarianism, and national self-reliance were all written in the visual narrative of independent India. By representing reality as it was and human harmony with nature, by idealising common men and women, workers and peasants, iconographically the symbolic repertoire of post-independence India was reminiscent of a type of socialist realism. In particular, the symbology of post-1947 India radically differed from the pre-independence repertoire. Whereas during the nationalist movement traditional idioms permeated the symbolic language of power and realism was seen as sign of Western domination [Pinney 1995], after independence western iconographical elements were integrated into a design that followed the rules of a more local visual semiotic. On the contrary, aesthetic realism becomes a mark of modernity and a "cultural corollary of the Nehruvian impetus to 'modernise' the nation" [Sircar 1997:113]. Moreover, because, according to Nehruism – the dominant ideology of the time – India had to abandon its parochial and religiously-restricted loyalties, India's official and legitimating symbolic constructions were partly lifted from their immediate cultural environment. Despite that all nationalist movements – Nehruism included – rely on traditions to support their claim that the modern nation-state is no other than an ancient community that was lost and that needs to be regained, in post-independence India a distinction was made between bad (communalism, casteism, sati, bigotry, and so on) and good traditions. Shorn of cognitive and emotive potentials, with the passing of time, these symbols were to become empty representations and bare signs.

To improve our understanding of how and why a particular symbolic system emerged in post-independent India, this chapter begins by focusing on the historical background of the foundation of the new republic. I then assess the process of social engineering initiated by the Indian state in order to create unity and bring development and progress, analysing in particular the propaganda strategies that sustained the post-independence symbolic repertoire. The next chapter provides a critical evaluation of the myths, symbols and rituals of the post-independence national identity under two separate headings: state symbolism and symbolism promoted by India's public institutions.

Nehru's Rise to Power

Despite many differences of opinions among the nationalist leaders, at the time of independence according to Embree [1980:134] there existed in India broad consensus on the character of a national ideology which was based on four principles: nationality understood in territorial terms, necessity of social change and the duty of the government to promote it, multi-party democracy and international recognition. India, it was generally agreed, would be a liberal democracy modelled on Westminster parliamentary system and based on the principles of equality before the law, universal suffrage and representative government. This consensus notwithstanding, before independence there still existed diverging visions of India. The Congress itself was not a party in the strictest of senses but a "forum" where diverging theories of nationalism and competing models of nationhood and identity were voiced. However, with the coming of independence, it was Nehru who in the main, shaped India's national ideology. Jawaharlal Nehru, who before independence was only one of the many faces of the nationalist movement, became the first Prime Minister of India and remained in office for seventeen years, till his death in 1964. It was Nehru's acquisition of the levers of power that fortuitously made Nehruism the winning ideology, rather than an ideological victory because there did not exist – ever – broad consensus over his idea of India [Khilnani,

1997:166]. Because power relations determine the creation of national symbol, Cohen [1973] contends that symbols are direct reflections of dominant ideological formation. Consequently, I would argue that Nehru became the 'signifying agent', or Young's terminology the 'cultural entrepreneur' [Young 1976, quoted in San Martin 2002:99], who, selected and articulated India's cultural elements that defined the national identity.

Nehru's India

If constitutions may be said to be autobiographical [Hall and Young 1997:218], then India's fundamental values are most obviously visible in such document. The wording of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution[2], as well as the sections on fundamental rights and directive principles highlight some of the fundamental values and guiding principles that emerged as epitomes of Indianness and of Indian national identity. The Indian Constitution of 1950 proclaims India as sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The words 'socialist' and 'secular' were introduced in the Preamble by the controversial 42nd Amendment that was pushed through by Indira Gandhi in 1976. However, both the colonial experience and the nationalist movement reinforced the belief that the only effective system of government responding well to the Indian needs was a full democracy. Nevertheless, India's features were believed to be naturally non-conducive to a stable democracy: illiteracy, traditional peasant society, widespread inequalities, low socio-economic development, extreme sub-centralisms (regional, linguistic, religious and ethnic) were all centrifugal forces that had to be restrained. It was believed that they could create cleavages that risked thwarting India's development

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[2] The preamble of the Constitutions reads as follows:
"We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; in our constituent assembly this twenty-sixth of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution."

of a truly competitive regime. Indeed, democracy in India is built on the value of non-discrimination [art.15(1)] to dismantle the system of discrimination of the caste-system and pre-empt the risk of religious discrimination after the atrocious events of partition of India and Pakistan[3].

Important for our study is also the fact that the Indian Constitution is a reflection of the ideology of territorial nationalism. Art. 5 of the Indian Constitution clearly defines citizenship in territorial terms and states that "every person who has his domicile in the territory of India and (a) who was born in the territory of India; or (b) either of whose parents was born in the territory of India; or (c) who has been ordinarily resident in the territory of India for not less than five years immediately preceding such commencement, shall be a citizen of India." This definition of citizenship in territorial terms successfully transcended – while recognising it – the multidimensional nature of Indian culture and created a notion of citizenship where the individual is linked directly to the state without the mediation of other types of associations [Sridharan 2000:314]. The framers of the Constitution were indeed concerned with prescribing general qualifications for citizenship. It is to the credit of the Indian Constitution that India does not create different classes or categories of citizens.

Another important feature of independent India was the centralisation of power. Despite being a federation of states, and its commitment to a competitive regime notwithstanding, the central state was allowed to intervene in order to introduce constitutional provisions that overrode India's extreme multi-pluralism and kept in check its centrifugal forces. The Congress elite led by Nehru set up highly centralised state institutions to ensure that a strong centralised leadership could guide India through the process of modernisation. In short, it was this form of nationalism that guaranteed the principles of pluralism. As Kaviraj argued:

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[3] See the Constituent Assembly Debates August 1945.

"[S]ecularism provided for a pluralism of religious practices; federalism encompassed the pluralism of regional cultures and democracy allowed expression of plural political ideals" [Kaviraj 1995:119].

Nehru embraced the principles of civic nationalism and strongly rejected religion as the basis for Indian national identity in the belief that religious (and parochial identities in general) stood in the way of India's future development and modernisation. Only the transcendence of territorial parochialism and ethnic and religious particularisms could yield to some measure of consensual acceptance of membership within the larger civic community of the nation. Accordingly, the Indian national identity could not be culturally determined as religion, caste, ethnicity, language and culture could not provide the basis for the commonness of all Indians. He obviously thought that India's centrifugal potentials had to be kept in check by the reinforcement of the fragile unity of India. Nehruism made a virtue out of a weakness: extreme fragmentation, lack of solidarity, and absence of a univocal, political and cultural unity were transformed into the positive symbol of tolerance and pliability, as synthesised by the slogan *unity in diversity*:

> "There are enormous differences in climate, in ways of living, and to some extent, among the people who live in the northern regions of India. And those who live in the south, and yet we all know that all those diversities and varieties are rather superficial, and that there has been, and is, a very fundamental unity which binds us all together, and this has not been broken in the past even when there were political divisions in India. [...] India has progressed in the past ages, with this diversity and at the same time with this fundamental unity." [SWJN 7:391]

Unity was also understood not just as an "essential deep grounding [...] which basically has governed India's outlook" [SWJN 7:391] but also as cooperation and solidarity:

> "We are a great country, a country with enormous variety, a variety that is good. [...] We should keep the variety, but that variety is only good when we are united and there is an essential unity behind it. [...] that unity is essential. That unity is not a superficial unity on the map or of some constitution, but the unity of heart and mind, which makes us feel like a large family, which has to be defended, which has to be worked for and which will lead us to co-operate with one another."[4]

Besides subscribing to the principles of democracy, state intervention, civic nationalism, secularism, and cultural pluralism, Nehru's idea of India sought to combine values of modernity and progress. "Progress" – intended both as change and development in its most technical significance and as "enlightenment" for the individual – became of particular importance to Nehruism. To Nehru, these values of progress, development and *enlightenment* became more important than the shared experience of the past. The past was seen as a starting point, a moment of inspiration for the projection of the nation into the future, but it was the future that was full of promises. And it was the shared experiences of the Indians *to be* and not the Indians that were, that Nehruism stressed and promoted. The past was never represented as the past for past sake, or as an appeal for a return to a fabled golden age. The importance of the past resided simply in its relations with the discourse of national progress and development. This attitude towards the past and the future was reflected in all cultural enterprises that dealt with history: museums, art, and archaeology. While on the one hand they exalted Indian past history and cultural traditions, they did not do it simply to educate the people on the history and culture of their own country but also to inspire progress and instil self-confidence for the future. It was obviously a retelling of the past that tended towards the future. Indeed, Nehru's fascination with the past was not in "reading about odd events that happened in the past but rather in its relation to the things that led to the present. Only then it become [sic] alive

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[4] "A Broadcast to the Nation" 19 October 1963 in Gopal [1981:335-336].

to me". [Gopal 1981:498].[5] This is evident for instance from the series entitled "Builders of Modern India", issued by one of the media units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. In its mythological retelling of the birth of the nation, in its neglecting of ancient history and predilection for the most recent nationalist movement, this series is very much part of Nehruvian ideology.

Nehru looked essentially to Western visions of modernity and progress. Essential part of this vision was the centrality of the state in bringing about rapid progress. Being 'alien' in origin, this model was constrained in its implementation by specific social settings that were not congruent with Western state models. In particular, the great pluralism of India's society played a decisive role in hampering Nehru's vision. Nehru felt that in this process the role of the state was essential. Thus, to forge closer links between the political establishment and India's civil society, the Indian state had to establish a structure of obedience and create a distinct national identity through the patronage and selections of myths, symbols, and public rituals. It is within this context that the Indian state embarked on a self-conscious effort to construct and propagate an idea of India. Indianness became a pliable target of social engineering guided by a theory of progress.

The Pedagogic Role of the State and the 'Nationalisation of the Masses'

New states emerging from the break-up of the British Empire not only had to manage the task of political and economic reforms but needed to develop a suitable national ideology capable of imaginatively supporting their achieved independence. In India in particular, with the decline of the older socio-political values and bonds that characterised the British Raj and the establishment of the republic, it became necessary to inspire new forms of civic loyalty.

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[5] An Address at the Opening of the National Art Gallery, Madras, 27 November 1951.

Moreover, the gaining of Independence in South Asia was marked by the terrible experience of Partition, when Pakistan and India were carved out British India. The communal riots which followed partition, in addition to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by the hand of a Hindu fanatic left deep scars in India's early history, shattering the already faltering dream of a uncomplicated Hindu/Muslim cohabitation. Communalism, provincialism, and narrow-mindedness and parochial attachments such as the family, caste, or region seemed to be the salient shared traits of independent India, none of which helped in the process of nation-building.

The main goal of India's post-independence policy was obviously to foster industrial agricultural and economic growth through state intervention. However, economic regeneration could not be divorced from social development. In many occasions, Nehru made it clear that national development was not simply a question of economic growth but also of social transformation that depended on the development of the individual[6]. However, at the time of Independence Indians were for the most part illiterate peasants without the vote. How could – the national élites argued – they have a sense of loyalty to the newly created state and towards each other? Thus, the symbolic system that was created was inscribed in the programme of social engineering, that aimed to define, through the propagation of the national myths and its symbols and rituals, India's new identity.

The main strategy for change was identified with education. The new education policy rested on the belief that Indians could be gradually transformed – through state intervention – from "traditional Indians" and from oppressed

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[6] See for instance: *The New India, Progress Through Democracy*, 1958:2. Nehru's ideas about development were quite common in post-colonial Africa and Asia. According to what became to be known as the developmentalist theory, the pedagogical role of the state in the post-colonial world demanded that the state took direct responsibility for the social (as well as the economic) development of the nation through heavy investment in education

subjects, into modern citizens. In this context, education was meant to be understood in its broadest of meanings. It meant not simply schooling and literacy, but it aimed at the political and civic education of the masses. For Nehru education was to be considered crucial in the process of nation-building and argued that the people of India had to become "mentally strong before [they] can think of building a nation" [SWJN, vol. 5:407][7]. Indeed, according to him, the real change must have to come "in the minds of men"[8] . He also added:

> "In the plans for the rebuilding of the nation, education has an important place, because that is the basis for all other activities. [...] The younger generation is our future. [...] The way their faculties are developed and minds moulded will make or mar India's destiny." [9]

Moreover, a correlation was established between education (years of schooling) and development – here understood to be more than the mere economic growth. Therefore, education could contribute to increase workers' productivity, raise farm or industrial production, population control, social equity and to inculcate ideology and moral values. The Report of the Education Commission (1964-1966) argued that the development of physical resources would not be possible without an adequate development of human resources which involved "changes in the knowledge, skills, interests and values of the people as a whole". [Singh 1995:2].

The First Five Year Plan viewed education essential for the realization of the general goals set by the Plan itself. The satisfaction of cultural needs (in particular

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[7] Speech at the fourteenth Session of the Central Advisory Board of Education, New Delhi 13 January 1948. From the *Hindustan Times,* 14 January 1948.

[8] "An Address at the All-India Educational Conference", Baradari, 27 December 1939. In Gopal [1981:253]

[9] "Discipline for Nation Building". Speech at the fourteenth session of the Central Advisory Board of Education, New Delhi 13 January 1948. From the *Hindustan Times,* 14 January 1948. In SWJN vol. 5:407

the "growth of the creative faculties, increase the capacity of enjoyment, and develop a spirit of critical appreciation of arts, literature and other creative activities"[10]) by the education system was seen as the last priority. Primarily the education system was considered important for national development in that it determined the quality of the human resources. Education was meant to prepare experienced and suitably qualified citizens for the specific tasks which the nation sets itself. Education was also considered to be important for national development in that it played a crucial role in strengthening the democratic system. The Plan argued that for democracy to function effectively it needed the "intelligent participation of the masses in the affairs of the country"[11] which education was believed to bring. Education was furthermore essential to development because it increased the spirit of cooperation and a sense of "disciplined citizenship" among the people. Eventually, the National Integration Council held in Srinagar in 1968 formally would recognise that the entire education system – from primary to post-graduate level – should serve the purpose of "creating a sense of Indianness, unity and solidarity, to inculcate faith in the basic postulates of Indian democracy and to help the nation to create a modern society"[12].

Accordingly, post-independent nationalism had to bring education, social and economic welfare to the illiterate masses. At the same time, it had to foster and inculcate in the minds of the people the new idea of India, to promote a new national culture and to encourage the population to assume their new social identities as citizens (and not subjects) of a democratic state. Further, the state aimed to inform the people of the ethical and moral values it adopted thus

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[10] *First Five Year Plan*: 525.

[11] Ibid

[12] Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education *Central Advisory Board of Education* [CABE] 34th Session 1968. www.education.nic.in/cd50years/g/12/5X/125X0201.htm accessed on 21/02/2006.

making them 'fluent' in the newly established 'civil religion'[13], with its lexicon, rites, and symbols.

Thus, the construction and establishment of a post-independence symbolic system must be seen as part of a programme of *nationalisation* of the masses [Mosse 1975][14]. This programme of nationalisation called for a well-devised strategy of information, or for a strong propaganda apparatus. Not only did the state take control of the official imagery of the nation but it also sought to play a larger part in regulating everyday life and in making more demands on private individuals than it ever did before[15].

Strategies of Nationalisation

> "Nations spend a great deal of money on symbols that are intended to build mass support for the political community, a diffused support expressed through national identification, patriotism, and pride. Flags, official uniforms and attire, national holidays, seals of

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[13] A civil religion is a common set of ideas, rituals and symbols "which relates a man's role as citizen and his society's place in space, time and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning" [Coleman: 1970:76]. In modern societies where the cohesive coefficient of religious beliefs has gone lost at the expenses of modernisation and secularisation, it is the 'cohesive force' that provides an 'overarching sense of unity' in a society [Novak 1974]. In modern societies political leaders are thus able to ensure social cohesion by establishing a "state-directed religion of good citizenship" based on the "dogmas of the existence of God, life after death, reward of just behaviour, punishment of transgression, and sanctity of the social contract and the law." [Gehrig 1979:5]. The concept of civil religion can explain the failure of Nehruvian symbolic repertoire in becoming India's civil religion. On this, see Chapter 4.

[14] This term was used by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. For Hitler the nationalisation of the German masses was to be the primary task for the resurrection of the German state. According to Mosse [1975] Nazi public festivals, national monuments, political cults, symbols and myths were the main instruments for the nationalisation of the German masses and crucial elements for the participation of the population in politics. Here this term mainly refers to a programme by which the state engages in a process of strengthening of the national attitude of the masses through the usage of symbolic resources.

[15] Embree [1980:134] identifies in this conviction of the responsibility of the post-colonial Government for the amelioration of the Indian masses the major difference between imperial and post-imperial rule.

> office, capitol buildings, courthouse, civics courses in schools, public ceremonies and funerals – all are symbolic expression of the political community" [Novak 1974:85].

The awakening of an "awareness of national oneness" and the enforcement of "moral and social values"[16] were at the basis of the programme of social engineering initiated by the Indian state. Similarly, according to the five-year plans – which came to successfully epitomise India's drive towards progress and development – development was made to depend on the promotion of cooperation and of a feeling of unity through the fostering of a programme of national integration. The subject of this enterprise[17] was India itself, or better the idea of India that was taking shape in the first years after independence. Values of secularism, democracy, progress and the concept of Indianness were reproduced in a variety of symbolic representations and practices. This symbolic repertoire was made up of its official emblem, national song and hymn, flag, ceremonial calendar, monuments, effigies on coins and notes, and stamps.

In assessing the symbolic repertoire of independent India, I would like to make an analytical distinction between two types of symbolic discourses and practices about the nation that emerged in post-independence India. On the one hand we find a national inventory of symbols whose repertoire (national flag, national anthem, national emblem, national calendar of official rituals and so on) was more or less fixed by the end of the 50s. They formed a stock of symbolic resources that from here onwards would be referred to as state official

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[16] *Third Five-Year Plan*. Quoted in Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education *Central Advisory Board of Education* [CABE] 34th Session 1968.
www.education.nic.in/cd50years/g/12/5X/125X0201.htm accessed on 21/02/2006.

[17] To denote this new concept and for want of a better term, the First Five Year Plan coined the new term 'social education'. [*First Five Year Plan*, Chapter 33]

symbolic capital. On the other hand the institutional production of national narratives contributed to the creation of India's symbolic capital. The media units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting became the most important mouthpieces of the state and its government. But other state agencies and institutions relayed the ideals and values of the Nehruvian model of nationhood and their articulations of nationhood produced compelling symbolic vocabularies. These symbolic representations taken all together conjured up an image of India, which was the expression of the nation's values, ideals and worldview.

In this context it would be relevant to note that this phenomenon was never seen as an excess of state authority and as infringing individual freedom. In general, the appropriation of the institutions by an indigenous democratically elected élites was seen as part of the process of independence. The passage from the imperial-foreign control of the local institutions to an indigenous government *per se* meant that the institutions were at the service of the nation and "belonged" de facto to the people. Paradoxically, the official literature, while often recognising that, since independence, India had finally entered the age of *people Raj*, invariably stressed the leading role of the state and of its institutions in instructing the masses.

But if the programme was the nationalisation of the masses, how were these symbolic constructions brought to the people? The Indian state set in motion a propaganda apparatus, financing and encouraging many institutions that dealt with different aspects of the national cultural life to disseminate and popularise the ideals of nationhood and of national identity. It implemented a programme of activities both at the central and state level. Part of the state resources was directed to the improvement of educational facilities at all levels with the consequent promotion of courses in Indian civilisation, culture and the arts. The state strengthened the library systems and its archives and museums. It promoted the Archaeological Survey of India and the much younger

Anthropology Survey of India, which played an important role in independent India's attempt to comprehend and classify its demographic profile. It also established three national academies to promote the arts and facilitate dialogues among cultures: Sangeet Natak Akademy (for the performing arts), Sahitya Akademy (for literature), and Lalita Kala Akademy (for the visual Arts). In particular it was the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which – more than any other institution – was invested with the role of promoting the symbolic vocabulary with which notions of Indianness were articulated. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry's posters publicising state enterprises dotted the urban landscape; newsreels and slideshows reporting about national and international current affairs were broadcasted before feature films in all cinema halls of India; van units travelled from village to village to inform the rural population about health issues and promote agricultural development; books and pamphlets were published at affordable prices and printed in several languages, while advertisements appeared in the national and in the vernacular press. With time, all these propaganda activities – this everyday 'flaggings of nationhood' [Billig 1995] – became a constant feature in the life of ordinary Indians. In short, mass media played a crucial role in the programme of nationalisation of the masses.

Mass Media and Nation-Building

In order to discuss the particular role of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the nationalisation of Indian masses, it is necessary to consider the role of mass media in the post-colonial world. In the 1950s, mass media, besides being a useful educational tool, were believed to play an essential part for the social and economic development of the nation. The basic purpose of the national media was to promote national development and national integration. This basic idea of media as an effective tool to educate the masses, to create solidarity and forge national identity found its origin in World War II and the audio-visual propaganda for the mobilisation for the war developed by the British and the

Americans, and from the example of nationalist propaganda in Germany under Nazism and in Soviet Russia. All these events contributed to support the idea that mass communication was crucial in the process of creation of a feeling of nationness and national integration. These beliefs were also influenced by theories of mass communication that prevailed at the time. According to Schramm [1963], one of the most influential media theorists of the time, in the developing world mass media had six essential functions: 1. To contribute to the feeling of nation-ness; 2. To be the voice of national planning; 3. To help teach necessary skills; 4. To help to extend the effective market; 5. To prepare people to play their new parts; 6. To prepare the people to play their role as a nation among nations. [1963:38-42]

Till the 1970s development communications occupied an important place in developmental policies in the third world. The belief was strong that information made available through the use of mass media could promote change. Exposure to mass media and to new ways of thinking would be enough to generate changes necessary for development. In addition, mass media would be crucial in promoting communication between the new state and the citizens, contributing to the process of institutions building. Ignoring structural factors of underdevelopment such as social and institutional factors, the development communication theory identified the locus of change in the individual, who was therefore believed to be ignorant and traditional and who – it was assumed – would not meekly submit to radical changes. The task to persuade, motivate, inform, communicate ideals, knowledge and skills and enlist support for the modernisation and industrialisation programme was thus entrusted to the mass media.

Thus, a link was established between development and communication, to the extent that it was assumed the most advanced and widespread the media, the faster the development. The centrality of the role of mass communication was furthermore consolidated by other development theories so much so that

during the 1960s, UNESCO set specific parameters to gauge media structures in developing countries. It compiled detailed reports on the state of mass media in developing countries, in which it was implied that those countries that did not fulfil the set parameters were believed to be underdeveloped. Moreover, this developmental theory entailed the notion that mass media were or should have been primarily a public service rather than a commercial enterprise, in which the example of the BBC played a crucial part. There was also a firm belief that the cultural transformation and development of a country was a process that was proceeding from the top down. Accordingly, mass media had per force to be under direct control of central governments. Although individual enterprises were encouraged and stimulated, they still had to conform with the broader framework of national development and with the promotion the national cause. As a result of this approach the state became the supreme controller of all media productions. Although the aim was to increase democratic support for the development project, the means were basically 'undermocratic' and near monopolistic.

In India, the importance of both mass communication for the development project and of state intervention in media development itself were already acknowledged in the First Five-Year Plan. The necessity to plan for the development of communication arose not simply from the belief in the centrality of mass media as a catalyst for development, but also from the intention to produce the right kind of communication development. Therefore, while its strategies and programmes were mainly aimed at people's development through educational programmes, the First Five-Year plan also implied the development of the communication infrastructures to support development in other sector of the economy[18]. Significantly, the major thrust of

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[18] The enthusiasm deriving from the belief in the centrality of the mass media within the developmental project were still alive in the eighth Five-Year Plan. However, here a radical

the Plan with regards to communication and media development, were to raise the level of people's consciousness and stepping up the pace of development. Indeed, mass media were not simply meant to contribute to the general education of the illiterate masses on matters of agriculture, health, family planning, but first and foremost to *enlighten* the people about issues that were key concern of the government, and to promote national integration.

State sponsored publicity covered a wide range of themes and issues: communal harmony, national unity, rural development, women empowerment, eradication of untouchability, agriculture, and cottage industries; history, culture, contemporary events (political and economical) and all official government reports on its activities and programmes. In a way, because of the vastness of the subcontinent it was considered important to make people (also those educated ones) aware of India's regional diversities and inform them about the progress of the country and about government's activities[19]. Media were used to promote Indian culture and create a sense of political, cultural and social unity among the nation's disparate communities. At the same time, mass media were used to speed up the project of national development and decrease regional and linguistic discrepancies, thus hoping to lessen parochial attachments.

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shift had occurred. For the first time mass media were specifically designated as promoters of human resource development: mass media was not intended anymore for the betterment of material welfare, eradication of illiteracy, poverty, diseases and the growth of material and agricultural production, but expressively for the growth of human capabilities.

[19] R R Diwakar, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, in *The Second Year*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publication Division 1949:121.

Advertising the Nation – The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and its Media Units

> "It is no good my complaining, because it is our fault if we cannot put across to our people the magnitude of the work that is being done in India at present ... I am anxious that we should reach our people in the villages as well as in the towns with some kind of a record of the work that has been done and that is going to be done ... I have come to feel more and more that that approach should be visual and through documentary films. These will go further and will create a much more vivid impression on our people than pamphlets and the like [...] I think our Film Division of the Central Government, our Planning Commission and our State Governments, should co-operate in putting about the numerous developmental activities that are going on all over the country. This will include not only great works like the Damodar Valley, Bhakra Nangal, Kirakud, etc., but also the community projects and the numerous smaller projects and instances of voluntary labour and the like in building canals, wells, roads, etc. It is not enough to give just a glimpse of something being done. It should be a longer and more educative picture and it should be taken in mobile vans to remote villages. Of course, it should be shown in our cinemas also, but I attach more importance to the approach to the villages. We should definitely aim now at educating our village folk through films. By this means also, we shall produce that understanding and enthusiasm that we wish to develop and, at the same time, a certain unity of outlook in our national planning".
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> [Nehru 1987:251-252]

Born out of the defunct Department of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India that was set up during the Second World War, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting became the main organ for the promotion of government's activities and plans. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's main functions – as required by the Government of India –

were to publicise Government policies and activities and to promote information for the advancement of the rural – mostly illiterate – masses spread over large distances. The Ministry took charge of the production and distribution of documentary films and newsreels, of broadcasting, of the registration of newspapers and of the approval of films for exhibition[20]. It comprised a number of constituent units: the Film Division (FD); the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP); the Press Information Bureau (PIB), the Publication Division (PD), the Song and Drama Division, the Photo Division, the Directorate of Field Publicity, All India Radio (AIR), and subsequently Doordarshan, the national TV channel.

Aware of the limits posed by the country's sheer vastness and mass illiteracy and poverty, communication was promoted with a large selection of mass media: radio, short films and newsreel, advertisement, print, and exhibitions, in a variety of languages, both national and regional. The format varied from audio-visual publicity programmes, to the less sophisticated booklets, leaflets, posters, hoarding, calendars, picture postcards, and press advertisements. Due to the large rate of illiteracy in the country, visual publicity in the form of print advertisements and the broadcast of short films and newsreels became the most spread means of government publicity before the diffusion of television. It is calculated that during the first 20 years of Indian independence government advertising in India grew by 90%[21].

The services of the Information and Broadcasting media units were rendered to the various Ministries and Department of the Central Government. At first, this material was mainly produced in English and Hindi, but efforts were made to translate it in several major regional languages. The publication of the

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[20] *The Organisation of the Government of India* 1958: 296.
[21] *Mass Media in India*, 1978

propaganda material was undertaken by the Publication Division, which produced (and still does) an impressive amount of books, pamphlets, and journals on behalf of various ministries, in order to provide reliable information about India, its people, and culture, about the activities of the government and the progress of development programmes. The Films Division was in charge of producing cinema slides, shorts, documentaries and the weekly newsreels required by the government of India for public information and for instructional and cultural purposes. During the first three years of independence, the Film Division had produced over 89 documentaries and 148 newsreels in five languages – English, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Telugu – which were distributed through 136 circuits to cover 3,000 cinemas[22]. Photos were supplied to all the Ministries for their internal and external publicity by the Photo Division, another independent unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Photo Division also provided photos for exhibition and printed publication. Another crucial unit of the Ministry was the Five-Year Plan Publicity[23]. Established in 1953, it was the largest rural-oriented unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which worked as a two-way communication medium not only bringing information about the programmes and policies of the government to the masses, mobilising public opinion and educating the people about the values of secularism, democracy and development, but also keeping the government informed about the people's reaction to its programmes and policies and their implementation. As with other Government publicity enterprises, the Five-Year Plan Publicity unit was created on the acknowledgment that "success of the Plan depends to a large extent on the understanding and cooperation in its implementation shown by the people [...] Unless adequate cooperation and effort is forthcoming the success of the Plan is uncertain and hence the need for

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[22]Parliamentary Debates, vol. iii, n.4, 18th March 1950.

[23] In 1959 the organisation was renamed Directorate of Field Publicity.

special publicity for the Plan and its objectives"[24]. A Song and Drama Division was created in 1954 with the specific objective to carry out plan publicity with the use of traditional and folk forms.

All these media units produced an incredible amount of publicity material. Nevertheless, it was the DAVP, the promotional branch of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, that became one of the most crucial organs for the development project and that, more than any other unit, contributed to the popularisation and dissemination of the ideals and models of nationhood, translating the Government views and goals in a compelling visual language. Its main functions included: release of display and classified advertisements, production and distribution of posters, broadsheet, folders, pamphlets, calendars, enamel boards and cinema slides. The DAVP was also in charge of the production of most of the material required by the Tourist Board, and advised the latter regarding the issues to be advertised in India and abroad. In other words, the DAVP was in charge of the production of the image of India for both internal and external consumption. By the end of the '70s the DAVP became the largest advertising agency in the country. Advertisements not only made the population aware of state policies and goals, but augmented productivity which in turn helped the state towards development[25]. The task of the DAVP in promoting social and economical change was particularly difficult, as the DAVP was engaged in the promotion of ideas and services and not of products. As the 1964 Vidyalankar Committee noted this was "the most difficult area of communication as it deals with attitudes, beliefs, and values to bring about

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[24] *The Organisation of the Government of India,* The Indian Institute of Public Administration, Bombay, 1958: 305-306.

[25] Ibid. See also, page 56: "advertising in our country has been a better catalyst of social and economic changes."

behavioural changes in people, 70% of whom are unlettered and resistant to any change."[26]

In the years, the DAVP handled a variety of publicity campaigns in connection with family planning, rural development programmes, food publicity, national integration and communal harmony, defence, economic policy, environment, literacy, employment, and health. Till the 1970s the DAVP was the only agency in India equipped with a nation-wide network of units and outdoor advertising facilities and its campaigns reached million of people through all media. The DAVP used different channels of communication for its purposes: advertising, exhibition, outdoor publicity (display of hoarding, kiosks, bus panels, wall paintings, cinema slides, and banners), printed publicity (booklets, folders, posters, leaflets, calendars, and diaries), audio and visual publicity (spots, quickies, jingles, sponsored programmes, short films, and documentaries), and mailing of publicity material.

Despite the crucial role played by the DAVP, with the expansion of radio networks and transmitters, All India Radio quickly became another suitable means to usher social change, economic uplift, educational progress and cultural transformation[27]. The radio was seen as suitable to India for the cheap cost of sets and relatively low investments for production and transmission of programmes. All India Radio started to broadcast in 1948. By 1950, AIR network consisted of twenty-one broadcasting stations that covered a large portion of India. In the same period, the number of domestic radio sets witnessed a three-fold increase. Community radio sets in rural and industrial areas and in schools numbered five thousand by the end of 1950. Programmes broadcast by AIR ranged from news reporting, educational programmes and special programmes broadcasted for the rural and

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[26] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. 1978. *Mass Media in India*: 114.
[27] Parliamentary Debates, vol. iii, n.4, 18th March 1950.

industrial workers. Programmes that offered opportunities to appreciate the cultural traditions of different regions, such as the very popular musical Round-Ups, were also strongly supported. News bulletins were broadcast in twenty-three different languages and "important events such as convocations, *mushairas, kavi sammelan,* openings of exhibitions, independence Day celebrations" were covered regularly by the radio[28].

The Family Planning Campaign

An example of one of the government campaign can be illustrative here. The case study chosen is the Family Planning Campaign launched in 1968. Although it was launched several years after Nehru's death[29], the Family Planning Campaign is still a remarkable illustration of the ways in which mass media were considered at the service of the development and modernisation programme in India and of the usage of particular symbols as communication tools. Moreover, this campaign is also important for our study in that it shows how the 'modern' message of the Family Planning Campaign could not depend on traditional symbolic representations which were snubbed in favour of symbols that were instead created ad hoc and that conformed to a particular aesthetic style of representation.

The overall objective of the campaign was to reduce the birth rate to 23% by 1978. The programme relied on a diffuse organisational set-up. However, in order to involve the masses to participate to this programme it was decided that it was necessary to launch a sophisticated publicity campaign. The mass communication

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[28] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. 1951. *Since Independence. August 15, 1947 to August 15, 1951*:125. Later on television will supplant the radio in this educational role. However, although programmes started in Delhi in 1959, there was hardly any progress in terms of hardware development and software production for the next twelve years. It is in 1972 that the inauguration of the second station in Bombay took place. But it is only with the advent of colour on the occasion of the Asian Games, that television expansion became remarkable.

[29] Nehru died on 27 May 1964.

campaign for this programme that was eventually devised had to take into consideration several things. First, to be effective, it had to take into consideration its target audience: the rural, almost totally illiterate population. Second, due to the lack of adequate infrastructures, it was decided not to rely on the use of the "modern media" (press, radio, cinema slides, films, mobile vans and printed material in general[30]), but to conduct the campaign using "older, existing media"[31]. This meant to employ outdoor publicity at its fullest: billboards, posters, handouts, matchboxes, banners, shopping bags, magazines and newspapers, pocket calendars, official civil registers, buses, rickshaws, large enamelled signs for steam locomotive and railroad crossing throughout India, and murals were all selected to carry the message of the family planning campaign. It was decided to use a consistent message: a direct exhortation to have a specific number of children ("*Ek, do, tin – bas!*" "One, two, three, that's enough"), and to present this message in the same form to all media for consistency, to keep the message always simple and not – interestingly – to publish anything in English. Thus, visually the basic message presented the stylised front-view faces of a smiling mother and father, a son and a daughter. The message, in words that no Indian could fail to understand, said simply: 'Two or three children are enough'. This caption was translated separately in 13 languages. Moreover, to give consistency to the visual message it was decided that the colours should always be the same – bright and attractive – and the faces drawn always in the same style[32].

A song was also written by a popular songwriter and sung by a voice recognisable by most Indians. A new symbol was created that could easily identify the family planning programme, the place and family planning workers. The symbol was a red equilateral triangle with the point facing downward. The selection

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[30] It was estimated that these media would only reach 20% of the entire population, usually urban or semi urban, where the need for intensive campaign was less felt.

[31] *Yojana*, September 15, 1968 page:18.

[32] *Yojana*, September 15, 1968, p.19.

of a symbol for the family planning campaign was arduous. The campaigners had to find a sign that had no other prior associated meanings and connotations, so that it could quickly be invested its distinctive new meaning – that one of family planning and possibly the whole concept of limiting children to two or three. The search was for a sign with such a design to make it capable to convey the meaning by itself – like the Red Cross – and that it could be without associations with any religious or regional traditions. The red triangle was though to be an excellent device to visualise and represent nothing except the issue it meant to be associated with in the public eye: family planning. The problems faced by the DAVP in its search for an effective symbol to associate with the Family Planning Campaign partly recalls the experience of the Election Commission in drawing up the list of approved electoral symbols. Frank Wilder, the Ford Foundation Consultant to the Government of India in Mass Communication for Family Planning, aptly noted in developing countries a symbol had to satisfy certain requirements: it had to be distinctive, easily reproducible and most importantly open to be verbalised in various languages [33].

Similarly, artists working for the DAVP who designed the campaign advertisements, were encouraged to produce a very simple message. This was usually obtained by drawing in minimum lines, avoiding too many details and any distinct regional touch. Indeed, the narrative intent of this symbolism (its concern with legibility and clarity of visual comprehension, and its great stereotypisation to present the objects by their more easily recognisable aspect) is characteristic of Nehruvian imagery. Even a cursory look at several published material, governmental advertisements, election symbols, and other decorative images in official publications, shows a remarkable similarity in style. Drawings were supposed to be simple characterised by few strokes and simplicity of lines. It was agreed that "colours should be bright and message in sans serif. Excessive variations of tone and too much delicacy of pattern should be avoided. Straight horizontal

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[33] *Yojana*, September 15, 1968:20-22.

lettering is best. A cartoon type illustration using lines and masses of colour will be much more satisfactorily reproduced than a full colour realist human face."[34]

Stylistically the new symbolic capital of the Nehruvian state to which the symbols of the Family Planning Campaign can be said to be illustrative examples, strived to efface tradition. Rather than following the rules of a localised visual semiotics, the visual language of post-colonial state communication system integrated western conventional iconographic elements. Moreover, the refusal to use regionally specific visual idioms should also point to the fact that the Indian state not merely wanted to be understood, but also to impose on all Indians a uniform national pattern of visualizing the subject. The campaign's objective was not merely intelligibility but also pedagogical.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter focussed on the process of nation-making in post-colonial India. It showed how India's postcolonial state undertook in earnest the work of producing and fostering a sense of national consciousness and sentiment through images and symbols of nationhood. The chapter also analysed the ways in which these images and ideals of nationhood were communicated, disseminated and implemented through a variety of discursive and non-discursive practices. Nation-making and the production of a sense of national identity in India were expression of Nehruvian nationalism. The discourse of identity accordingly sought to ground the concept of nationhood in a discourse of development, modernity and progress and put the individual at the centre of this development strategy. In other words, nation-making in India became a programme of social engineering.

Strong symbolic constructions – capable of generating a feeling of unity and identity with the new entity of the nation and to keep in check India's centrifugal

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[34] *Mass Media in India* 1978:50

potentials, fissiparous tendencies, and strong sub-culturalisms – became part of India's symbolic repertoire. This symbolic repertoire was part of a legitimating discourse, which depicted the nation, its leaders, its people, and its future. It replicated the official narratives on the basis of which the nation made its claims to legitimacy, and exhorted the people to comply, aiming at shaping their behaviour and tastes. It also provided India with a new national image that reinforced the country's self-respect and the unity among its people. It is through the analysis of these symbolic constructions that we may understand how the national élites perceived the nation, as well as how they wished others to perceive it. This is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Dams, Cogwheels and Kisans

> "[...] we should remember that India does not belong to any one party or group of people or caste. It does not belong to the followers of any particular religion. It is the country of all, of every religion and creed. We have repeatedly defined the type of freedom we desire. In the first resolution, which I moved earlier, it has been said that our freedom is to be shared equally by every Indian. All Indians shall have equal rights, and each one of them is to partake equally in that freedom. We shall proceed like that. And whosoever tries to be aggressive will be checked by us. If anyone is oppressed we shall stand by his side. If we follow this path then we shall be able to solve big problems, but if we become narrow-minded we shall not be able to solve them."[1]

Nehruvian ideology was based on a combination of nationalism, progress, utilitarian rationalism and modernism. These shared collective ideals and political values that became constituent parts of India's post-colonial national identity were translated in a large repertoire of symbols and symbolic resources, some of which became very popular. The image of India as an imaginative construct [Foster 1997] that emerged was of an extremely variegated nation which despite its inherent diversities was also united in the pursuit of progress and development. This conceptual framework was translated in discursive and non-discursive practices. The verbal and visual idiom employed by the Nehruvian state was epitomised by images of dams, electric pylons, and heavy industry while words such as progress, development, and the adjectives modern, scientific and new dominated its rhetoric. As for the imagined

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[1] Jawaharlal Nehru, Constituent Assembly Debates 14 August 1947..

community of nationals, Indians were represented as citizens whereby common political participation – rather than ethnicity or religiosity – was the basis of their relationship to the state. Because of the singular power of the state, much of this discourse on nationalism was official. State agencies were involved in the production of this particular imaginative construct, as the preferred agents of this discourse.

The previous chapter examined the ways in which state disseminated images and ideals of nationhood. This chapter instead focuses on the how the meanings and values that became associated with the nation and with the claims about national identity – that were articulated in the propaganda activity of the government – were translated into symbols of nationalism. In the next section, I will first look at the state's official symbolism, to then turn to assess the symbolism promoted by India's major institutions reflecting the analytical distinction made in the previous chapter between two types of complementary symbolic discourses and practices about the nation that emerged in post-independence India.

India's Official Symbolism

> "On the day when peace was signed at Versailles after the last war, I happened to be in Paris. There was great rejoicing everywhere and flags of all nations decorated the Opera House. There came on the platform a famous actress with a beautiful voice, for whom the proceedings were interrupted while she wrapped round herself the flag of France. The entire audience rose as one man and sang with her the National Anthem of France – the Marseillaise. An Indian near me with tears in his eyes turned to me and said 'When shall we have our own Flag?' 'The time will soon come', I answered, 'When we shall have our own Flag and our own Anthem.'"[2]

Quoting Easton [1965] and Almond and Verba [1963], Elder and Cobb [1983] distinguish between different categories of political symbols. They classify

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[2] Sarojini Naidu; Constituent Assembly Debates, vol. IV, 22 July 1947

political symbols according to the defining properties of the political system they belong to. They distinguish between three categories of symbols: those pertaining to the political community; symbols associated with regime norms, structures and roles; and situational symbols relating to current authorities, non-governmental political actors and policies and policy issues [Elder and Cobb 1983:36]. The typology they present is a loosely hierarchical one. Thus, symbols belonging to the political community are believed to be more inclusive and enduring, while situational symbols are to be understood as being more specific and transient ones. The more inclusive the political symbols, the higher their 'symbolic weight'. A symbol's weight depends on the intensity of its affective or emotional component. Thus, those symbols belonging to the political community tend to possess the greatest affective component. These are what Elder and Cobb [1983] call higher-order symbols. Studies show that basic identification and affective orientations towards to such prominent symbols are normally acquired early in childhood [Elder and Cobb 1983:39]. Later, an individual will tend to give a deeper cognitive orientation to his or her symbolic attachments, but the basic disposition acquired in childhood tend to persist. Therefore, higher-order symbols tend to be more enduring than lower-order ones. However, given that symbolic repertoires are specific to a political culture at a particular time, this does not mean that over time lower-order symbols can not become higher-order ones[3].

In this section, the objects of our analysis will be India's higher-order symbols: its flag, national emblem and the ceremonial calendar of national holidays that provided occasions to revive India's symbolic identity and revamp people's sense of attachment and belonging to the nation through ritual action. This official symbolic apparatus has – for the most part – remained unchallenged despite the changes in India's political panorama. Partly, this symbolic capital was

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[3] Elder and Cobb [1983:40] use the example of situational symbols of authority figures (Washington and Lincoln) in America that with time have become higher-order symbols.

a carryover from the pre-independence period. However, with the coming of independence this symbolic repertoire needed to be altered and expanded. A new national emblem, flag, and calendar of national holidays needed to be quickly devised and implemented. This urgency can be readily appreciated if one considers that in the immediate post-independence period banknotes with the image of King George VI were still circulating[4] and there was confusion as to what anthem should be played abroad[5] [Fig 1 and 2].

For those new nations emerging from the colonial experience, without a former, shared notion of national identity, it was difficult to translate the abstract idea of the nation into a symbolically alive reality. Often in these cases, powerful symbolism and rituals were provided by the religious establishment and its traditions. But in societies characterised by religious pluralism and multiculturalism like India where no church or credo could furnish the basic symbolism for the national community, the equivalence of one particular religion with civic symbols and rites risked becoming a factor of social division. To create solidarity and collective ideals where common beliefs or creeds did not exist, the Indian state had to search for appropriate symbolic structures that could be both meaningful and acceptable to most of the Indian population. India's national symbolism was devised in the years that immediately

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[4] While the transition of currency management from colonial to independent India was fairly smooth, India retained the monetary system and the currency and coinage of the earlier period till 1950. During this period of transition (1947-1950) the King's portrait and the image of a tiger kept to be reproduced on the 1 Rupee coin as well as on banknotes [Fig. 1]. However, the incorporation of symbols of sovereignty and indigenous motifs had to be chosen. The new design for the 1 Rupee banknote – which still largely replicated the previous ones – prominently displayed the Lion Capital of Sarnath, the national emblem of India. This emblem was also reproduced on the coins issued on 15th August 1950. Significantly, on the reverse of the 1 Rupee coin a sheaf of wheat replaced the Tiger thus symbolising not just rural India but a focus on progress and prosperity.

[5] On the confusion over the national anthem, see Circular to Governors, 7 March 1948 [SWJN 5:455], Note to Cabinet, 21 May 1948 [SWJN 6:277], Note to Cabinet 23 May 1948 [SWJN 6:281] and Letter to Shyama Prasad Mookerjee 21 June 1948 [SWJN 6:284].

followed independence and by the end of 1950s India's symbolic apparatus was all in place.

Fig. 1 Rs. 5 and 10 Banknotes with King George VI

Fig.2 1949 Rs. 1 Banknote with Asoka Capital

Fig. 3 Asoka Capital

The choice of the Sarnath Capital as India's national emblem illustrates this point quite clearly [Fig. 3]. India's national emblem is the reproduction of the Sarnath

capital of one Asoka's most famous pillars[6]. It consists of four (but only three are visible) lions seated back to back on an abacus, at the centre of which there is a wheel with twenty-four spokes, with a bull on the right and a horse on the left (in reality, the animals are four. In addition to horse and the bull, a lion and an elephant are also depicted alternated with the 24-spoked wheel). The abacus rests on a lotus-vase. The words 'Satyam Eva Jayate' – Truth alone Triumphs, the opening words of a verse extracted from the Mundaka Upanishad (III.1.6) – are inscribed below the national emblem in Devanagari script. Its symbolism is quite complex and it is both religious and secular. According to the religious interpretation of its symbolism, the four animals are believed to symbolise four different periods of the life of Buddha. The four lions surmounting the capital instead represent Buddha's kingship over the four worlds (the lions symbolising the four directions: north, south, east and west). In the secular reading of the Sarnath Capital, the four animals would represent the four territories surrounding Asoka's empire (the lion is the north, the elephant is the east, the bull is the south and the horse is the west). The four lions instead symbolise Asoka's rule over the four directions. The 24-spoked wheel is – according to this interpretation – not the wheel of Dharma but the symbol of just rule.

Indeed, the choice of the Indian national emblems is a typical example of a multicultural state struggling to symbolically define its newly acquired national identity. In choosing the symbol of the state, the leaders of India turned to Buddhist

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[6] Asoka [273-232 BC] was the emperor of the Mauryan empire. Under his rule, the empire stretched from Afghanistan to Bengal and as far south as modern-day Mysore. In later life, Asoka converted to Buddhism out of remorse after the battle of Kalinga [254-265 BC] where about 100,000 people perished, 150,000 were deported and many more died of other causes. He spent the remaining portion of his reign preaching Buddhism and pursuing the policy of non-violence.
Asoka is credited with having erected a series of columns that have become famous as pillars of Asoka. These pillars were dispersed throughout the empire and were carved with proclamations of Buddhist teachings, also known as edicts of Asoka. The Sarnath Pillar is probably one of the most famous ones. Sarnath is in Uttar Pradesh, north of Varanasi. It was in Sarnath that Buddha preached his first sermon in 528 BC after he reached enlightenment.

symbolism, rather than resorting to the highly 'conflictful' [Mckim Marriott 1963], but very evocative, Hindu and Muslim cultural traditions and found inspiration in the Buddhist emperor Asoka. The decision of using Asoka's emblems was not entirely accidental. They consciously chose the Buddhist emperor Asoka mainly for his characteristics of being "a major indigenous ruler of spiritual pretensions who belonged to no caste, no embattled region and no threatening or threatened religion" [Mckim Marriott 1963:35][7].

It is possible that the Indian intelligentsia of the 1950s appropriated Asoka's symbols of power in an attempt to find legitimation for the new state both in the Maurya and British past by associating India with previous prestigious leaders and historical eras, as "[t]he fact that the original lion capital [...] was erected by Emperor Asoka (...), invests the Emblem with historical and spiritual significance"[8]. But Asokan symbolism was also employed for the design of the national flag. A reproduction of the wheel appearing on Asoka's Sarnath Capital is depicted at the centre of the white band of the Indian flag replacing the *charkha* of the pre-independence flag[9]. The lure of Asoka as India's "premier national hero" and of its related Buddhist influence was all-inclusive: even Nehru's foreign policy found inspiration in Buddhism and in the *Panch Sheela*, the Five Principles, Buddhist philosophy of peaceful coexistence. Buddhist motives and ornamentation also inspired modern architecture (Mckim Marriott 1963), as the Asoka chain of hotels.

A state's ceremonial calendar of national holidays also provides occasions to articulate the nation's symbolic identity and foster its people's sense of

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[7]Of notice is the fact that for the British studying Indian art – and indeed up to the 1970s circa – only the earliest forms of Indian art and in particular Buddhist art were considered worthy of appreciation, as, after the decline of Buddhism, Indian art entered a long phase of decadence that presumably extended till the modern era.

[8] *India 1954. A Reference Annual*,1954:40.

[9] On the symbolism of the wheel in the national flag see Chapter 1.

attachment and belonging to the nation through ritual action. Ceremonies and processions while being obvious rites of integration provide a symbolic definition of identity and delimitation of one's community. National official holidays are important features in the life of a nation. They are a recognition and celebration of the nation's cultural tradition and most importantly "the most obvious and recognisable ways in which national identity is performed [...] when the nation and its symbolic attributes are elevated in public display" [Edensor 2002:72]. Public national holidays represent critical moments in which the people celebrate the nation and themselves. Moreover, national holidays are powerful tools to bind the people together and to make them feel part of the same entity of the state. The simultaneous celebration of the same festival or state holiday erases regional, linguistic, and sectarian differences instilling a sense of oneness among the population. Studying American civic rituals, the sociologist Robert Bellah [1967] claimed that these ritual practices were instances of a well-institutionalised civil religion of worship of the American state. According to him, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving Day, Fourth of July, the celebrations of Veterans Day and of the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln are instances in the America's annual ritual calendar when the symbolism of the nation gets dramatically enacted. In the words of Lloyd Warner, these civic rituals "allow Americans to express common sentiments about themselves and share their feelings with others on set days pre-established by the society for this very purpose." [Warner 1974:90].

In November 1952, a Calendar Reform Committee was set up to create uniformity among the diverse indigenous lunar and solar calendars. Up to then, in India there were not less than thirty calendars differing in the era beginning, year-beginning and to some extent also in the method of time reckoning. Some of the calendars were religious (Gregorian, Hejira), while others were civil but of indigenous origin. Because of this diversity, it was quite common to find that some of the festivals that were observed throughout the country were celebrated in fact, on different days

depending on almanacs based on different methods of time-calculation. Obviously, this diversity created a great deal of confusion.

For administrative purposes and obvious pragmatic reasons, the Indian state required a uniform calendric system. Most importantly though, this multiplicity of calendars resulted in inconvenience for the process of unifying the nation. Acknowledging the important role played by public ceremonies to forge a national identity, the Calendar Reform Committee greeted the creation of a uniform national calendar that would, "by acting as a social cementing force, usher a new element of unity in India which has become politically united after the advent of independence"[10]. In carrying out its task, the Calendar Reform Committee was faced by a significant problem: the new calendric system had to respect, and equally represent all different religious traditions of India, while avoiding, at the same time, the celebration of one particular faith against the others. The committee submitted its report to the Government of India in 1955 and in 1957 the Government of India eventually decided to adopt, together with the official civic national Gregorian calendar, an all-India National Calendar based on the calendar used by the Saka kings of Ujjain around the time of Christ[11].

The Calendar Reform Committee recognised several types of public holidays. There are "General Holidays" (i.e. secular state holidays), Hindu Religious Festivals, Christian Religious Festivals and Mohammedan Religious Festivals. While these last

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[10] *Calendar Reform* - Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. 1957:5-6.

[11] According to this calendar, the year 0 roughly begins on the vernal equinox of 78 AD, dating the beginning of the Saka dynasty of Ujjain.
In addition to the Gregorian and Saka calendars, the Calendar Reform Committee also adopted a religious calendar called *Rashtriya Panchang*. This is a luni-solar calendar based on the *Suryasiddhanta* (the first Indian astronomical treatise written around 400 AD). The *Rashtriya Panchang* was established to bring uniformity to the various religious calendar and almanacs that – due to difference in astronomical computations – could diverge on festival dates even by as much as a month.

three categories are self-explanatory, the General Holidays section includes days such as New Year's Day (according to the Gregorian Calendar), Indian New Year's Day (corresponding to the Spring equinox), and the four state public holidays: Republic Day (26 January), Martyrs' Day (30 January), Independence Day (15 August) and Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (2 October). The fact that the Indian state chose three days for national celebration is very significant. Although respectful of the need of the different religious communities and traditions, the state recognised the importance of setting some days when it would celebrate itself. Indeed, this was a recognition that while fixing the date for the celebration of religious festivals such as Holi or Muharram on a national level made it possible to observe these holidays simultaneously throughout the country thus instilling a sense of unity, these festive occasions were indeed limited to a single religious community. Therefore, while the simultaneity of the celebration contributed to the creation of a feeling of unity – and at the same time encouraged also all to see separate religious groups as being part of a single nation – on the other hand it risked celebrating one religious community and not the nation. Sometimes, it happens that even civil ceremonies still bear some religious flavour or are accompanied by religious celebrations that contribute to the rooting of the temporal celebrations within the age-old tradition system. On the contrary, the public holidays introduced by the Indian state are devoid of any religious content and are not set out to rival any religious holidays. Therefore, in India state and religious holidays are separated, but not mutually exclusive. However, this also meant that the introduction of new national customs, which were not part of the customary public celebrations and religious ritual traditions, demanded special efforts for the transformation of these ceremonies from sterile state rites into deeply felt national celebrations. And for Independent India this emotional garb was provided by the symbolical repertoire of the nationalist movement. These Indian public holidays all celebrate the nationalist movement, its martyrs and its ultimate goal: the Indian state itself.

National Ceremonies: Republic Day and Independence Day

A brief look at two of India's national holidays as collective rituals of national identity is appropriate here. It is through these rituals that we may understand how national élites and citizens perceived the nation, as well as how they wished others to perceive it. National rites are indeed important vehicles by which the state suggests and reinforces its own particular version of political reality, while re-affirming, in a dramatic form, the images and symbols that are part of a state's worldview. By showing the crowds the great symbols of the nation (the flag, the national emblem, the army, its children, its different cultural heritages) and by creating the opportunity for a large crowd to gather, this type of ceremony usually has a strong emotional impact on the people who take part in it, increasing the sense of belonging and of identification of the individual to the group[12]. Public national ceremonies are highly symbolical actions where nothing is left to the case: the date, the location, the sequence of the events and the nature of the events are all carefully selected and bear great symbolical weight.

A brief account of India's first Republic Day opened this thesis. There the aim was primarily to focus the attention on the significance of symbolic representations in politics. Here, I would like to draw the attention on the specifics of this particular public festival and its role in the construction of the symbolic capital of post-colonial India. India's Republic Day is celebrated on 26 January. It was on that day in 1950 that India adopted the Constitution and became *de facto* a sovereign democratic Republic. The 26th January also commemorates another event. It was on 26th of January 1930 that the people of India, represented by the Indian National Congress, took a pledge to work towards independence from the British and for establishment of a sovereign republic. Besides paying symbolic homage to the Constitution and to the ideals and values it enshrines, the celebration of the Republic Day is also an occasion in which the state draws attention to itself and to its achievements.

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[12] Republic Day Parade broadcasts on All India Radio first and on Doordarshan later became particularly popular contributing to the promotion of this feeling of solidarity.

The Republic Day national ceremony with its parade and pageants was born out an initiative of Nehru himself[13], with the aim of bringing together the great tribal and rural heritage of India in New Delhi, to stress the theme of unity in diversity and to strengthen a sense of national identity. A grand ceremonial parade that passes through Rajpath, an immensely broad road that links Rashtrapati Bhavan (the Presidential Palace) to India Gate. The main function features an impressive military parade where all the various army corps are represented (the paratroopers, the Elephant Corps, the Navy, and the Air Force with a spectacular flypast with aircraft in various formations). Tableaux representing the Indian cultural diversity and India's progress and achievements in various fields follow the military parade. These floats come from the different regions of India and every year there is an overarching cultural theme that dictates the style of the floats' displays.

The very first Republic Day celebrations did not include a pageant. However, as a publication of the time noted, the inclusion of the cultural pageant in the Republic Day procession was important to promote and display India's great cultural wealth but also feelings of belonging and the theme of unity in diversity:

> "so that foreigners and Indians alike, get an idea of the diverse features of India and the unfathomable wealth cultivated and preserved in the old traditions (...) Not only through folk dances, but as part of the pageant of India, theses groups enliven the Republic day festivities (...) But the essential motive in this and all other activities planned as part of the Republic day rejoicing is to stress the theme of unity despite the diversity as the great heritage of India from time immemorial."[14]

Besides the specificities of its ritual practices, what it also important about the Republic Day celebrations is the locale of the celebrations. What is symbolically

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[13] *Republic of India*, 26 Jan 1958:27.
[14] Ibid.

significant about the site of this public ritual is that the Republic Day takes place in an area of Delhi which was originally the site of British power in India. Rajpath is part of the much larger architectural complex that is still known nowadays as Lutyens' Delhi[15]. Although the buildings of Lutyens' Delhi are spread on a vast site, originally this open space was not designed to accommodate large crowds for state ceremonies or pageants. Lutyens' impressive architectural complex could indeed have provided an ideal setting for solemn celebrations, but it was hardly an "inclusive" space. On the contrary, it was a site of differentiation, whose primary function was to house power, and to instil awe and respect. The distance from the previous sites of Mughal power and the attempt to verticality and hierarchy represented by Raisina Hill were intended as means to achieve prominence and command attention[16]. Significantly, after independence, with the transfer of power, came the 'nationalisation' of this British site of power. It was within this spirit of re-appropriation of the sites of power that attempts were made to provide Lutyens' New Delhi with symbols of identification with the new national body politics. The names of the streets and of some of the buildings were changed with denominations that were meaningful to the Delhites.

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[15] When in 1911 the British announced their intention to transfer the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, it was decided to build the new governmental buildings on the virgin grounds south of the Mughal citadel. Before, the British settlements were located immediately north of Old Delhi in what still goes under the name of Civil Lines. New Delhi was therefore designed to celebrate the British Empire despite the fact that by the time of its completion (1930s circa) the Empire was already challenged by a strong Nationalist movement, which, not content anymore with parliamentary reforms, was asking for complete independence.
Lutyens' New Delhi consists of Rajpath (formerly called Kingsway) flanked on either side by ornamental ponds, at whose western end lies Rashtrapati Bhavan and the two large Secretariat Buildings. Rashtrapati Bhavan and the two Secretariats sit upon a small rise known as Raisina Hill. Rashtrapati Bhavan is the centrepiece of New Delhi and was the former residence of the Viceroy. It combines Mughal and western architectural styles. On the eastern end lies India Gate, a 42-metre high stone arch of triumph.

[16] The whole complex of Lutyens' New Delhi is in stark contrast with Mughal Old Delhi, built along the river, with its maze of narrow streets and bazaars. In fact, New Delhi was purposely built as the imperial site of power and did not intend to fulfil the civic role of a city, as it was made clear by the Delhi Town-planning Committee, appointed in 1912 to select a site for the new Imperial City. On this, see *First Report of the Delhi Town Planning Committee on the Choice of a Site for the New Imperial Capital*, 1913 and the *Second Report of the Delhi Town Planning Committee on the Choice of a Site for the New Imperial Capital*, 1913.

Thus Kingsway became Rajpath; the Viceroy Palace, Rashtrapati Bhavan; and so on. Attempts were also made to encourage the use of the vast space for public activities, the Republic Day parade being one of these[17]. Thus, Republic Day besides being a ritual of national integration and a symbol of democracy, with its ceremonial and physical appropriation of erstwhile British sites of power, celebrates also the defeat of the British, and the triumph of freedom, while commemorating the victory of the people in establishing a democratic rule vis-à-vis the undemocratic colonial regime.

The other national public holiday of great symbolical interest is Independence Day, the sole Indian festivity that comes close to a celebration of a military victory. It is celebrated on 15th August, the day that marked the end of the British Empire and the departure of the British from the subcontinent. This public holiday is celebrated throughout the country but, again, it is in Delhi that the action takes place. The Independence Day ceremony is much simpler than the Republic Day Parade and it extends to only one day. Nowadays, on this occasion the Prime Minister visits the *samadhis*[18] of Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi, and, after having paid homage to these leaders for their contribution to the nationalist struggle and for their roles in independent India, the Prime Minister delivers an address from the ramparts of the Red Fort where the national flag is raised. If, to a large extent, Republic Day is a celebration of the Constitution and of the basic values which make up the foundations of the Indian nation thus requiring more elaborate rituals, Independence Day commemorates the nationalist movement. In its ritual sequences, it is a re-enactment of the first Independence Day when, from the rampart of the Red Fort, Jawaharlal Nehru,

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[17] Even now, the lawns along Rajpath and around India Gate are an elected place of leisure for those civil servants seeking refugee from the heat and at sunset by all the Delhites enjoying an evening promenade. The area nearest to the Houses of Parliament, known as the Boat Club, has since become the elected locus of political activity and of public demonstrations and processions [Gupta 1994:264].

[18] *Samadhi* is the place of a funeral pyre.

after that hundreds of Union Jacks were lowered the night before, unfurled the Indian tricolour.

As with the Republic Day parade, the locale of the Independence Day ceremony is rich in symbolical meanings and connotations. Both Lutyens' Delhi and the Red Fort – once symbols of imperial subjugation – have become primary symbols of national identity demarcating India's nation space. The Red Fort is located in the heart of Old Delhi and it is indeed the perfect place from which to address the crowds: it is imposing in its architectural structure and provides an ideal place for a large crowd to gather. But its complex and multiple connotations are perhaps more embedded in the historic past of the Red Fort than in its architectural structure. The Fort is associated with the Mughal past and therefore with an indigenous empire and grandeur. This association became a source of legitimacy for the new nation, a legitimacy that was not deriving from the more recent British past (as for the Republic Day Parade), but from autochthonous history. The Red Fort had stronger connotations embedded in the history of the Mutiny and of the nationalist movement. After the Mutiny of 1857, the British occupied the Fort and re-inscribed the site with new power symbols, transforming it into army barracks. They destroyed most of the original buildings, rich gardens and marble pavilions. The landscape was reshaped (English lawns in place of luxurious Mughal gardens) so that the place could resemble a nostalgic image of England[19]. It was in the Red Fort as the Headquarters of the British Army that the trials of the Indian National Army officers were conducted[20]. With Independence, this disfigured symbol of Mughal power became revitalised and

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[19] By razing to the ground and plundering the Fort, the British were to symbolically signify a recrudescence of their rule which was de facto sanctioned by the dissolution of the East India Company and the transfer of the Indian possessions directly under the British Crown.

[20] According to a former freedom fighter C V Varad it was Subhas Chandra Bose's famous call to arms (*Chalo Delhi Lal Kila – Lal Kila Lenge, Tiranga Leherayenge.* Quoted in Masselos 1990: 46), which prompted the Bombay Provincial Congress Conference to move a resolution on 3 August 1947 according to which the main independence day celebration be held at the Red Fort (*Times Of India,* 16 August 1987:p.8).

reconverted as a tourist attraction and not as a site of power although, in August 1947, Nehru stated the intention to redress the balance by announcing that "the historic Red Fort would be the official Headquarters for the New Indian Army"[21]. Thus the Red Fort became a symbol of India's grandeur and of its nationalist movement – both as the site of the Mutiny rebellion and of the Indian National Army trials. The Red Fort became part of a wider post-colonial national narrative of syncretic nationalism, which regarded the Mughal period as the "second Classical Age" in Indian history (Kundra and Bawa 1991: 135). In this way, the Fort established continuity with the Indian past, defining the British Raj as a parenthesis within the much larger span of Indian history.

These ritual practices articulate the fundamental political myth detailing the origins and the consecrated political norms of independent India. The nationalist struggle for independence (dramatically epitomised by the physical 'occupation' of the British sites of power – Lutyens' Delhi in the Republic Day Parade and Red Fort on Independence Day), democracy, independence, Gandhi, unity and diversity are some of the symbols that form the fabric of India's political myth and that – as Kertzer justly notes – "provide a way to understand such abstract political entities as the nation and a means (indeed the compulsion) of identifying with them." [Kertzer 1988:13]. Indeed, the dramatic character of these celebrations contributes to the emotional participation of the people and to the galvanisation of their support of the legitimacy of the nation-state. Moreover, temporal synchronicity and thematic uniformity of these ritual practices further promote national unity – a point stressed by the Calendar Reform Committee. Participation in the same ritual action at exact the same time in cities throughout the country gives people the impression of belonging to the larger political entity of the nation.

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[21] Circular Information and Broadcasting Department, GI, 2 August 1947 in IOR, L/P & J/ 10/136, f207.

Lower-order Symbols

Higher-order symbols were the focus of the previous section. Here, I will look at what Elder and Cobb [1983] define lower-order symbols: symbols pertaining to regime norms, structures and roles and some situational symbols such as policy and policy issues and governmental authorities. Lower-order symbols are less durable and inclusive than higher-order ones and their symbolic weight is also considered lighter. Therefore lower-order symbols are the objects of less intensive affective orientations [Elder and Cobb 1983:39].

The Indian electoral system with its choice of system of voting and establishment of an approved list of electoral symbols provides a good example of political symbols of the regime[22]. India's electoral system is an outward manifestation of the commitment of the Indian state to the democratic and secular principles and ideals enshrined in the Constitution. After an Election Commission was established in 1950 for the "superintendence, direction and control of elections"[23], India, like in many other democratic countries, adopted the symbol system as its system of voting. However the similarities with other democracies ended there as India's system of voting was characterised by two distinctive features: first, Indian political parties were not entirely free to choose their electoral symbols; and second – at least in theory – Indian electoral symbols were not meant to be representations of parties' ideologies. On the contrary, according to India's electoral system, electoral symbols were assigned to parties and candidates from an official list drafted by the Election Commission itself. It appears that this idiosyncrasy of the Indian electoral system was dictated by a necessity of the Indian state to intervene in his pedagogic role and introduce

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[22] For a deeper analysis of India's electoral symbols, see Vittorini [2003].

[23] See Article 324(1) of the Constitution. The Election Commission of India is responsible for regulating the procedures for delimiting electoral constituencies, making electoral rolls, appointing returning officers, and devising rules for the nomination of candidates, the conduct of the polls and counting of votes and last but not least to supervise the allotment of electoral symbols.

constitutional provisions to ensure that the electoral mechanism – a fulfilment of India's democratic ideals – was efficient and free from abuse and corruption.

In the beginning, the Election Commission stated that electoral symbols could not have controversial political or religious significance. Therefore, the Election Commission drafted a list of uncontroversial official signs, from which emblems that may have been regarded as overtly religious or political were systematically excluded. Symbols employing the Indian flag, the national colours, the cow, the image of Gandhi or the *charkha*, the cross, the trident, the monkey, the Buddha, the *swastika* and the *Om* were all ruled out.

In carrying out its task of regulating the uses of electoral symbols, two major concerns preoccupied the Election Commission: the electoral symbols to be adopted by the political parties of India had to be of such shape and form as to be able to contribute to the project of making the election process simple for the masses and to be uncontroversial and relatively free from emotional significance as to mirror India's commitment to the democratic principles and ideals expressed in the Indian Constitution. The underlying ideas behind this choice were that the Indian masses were not considered politically mature and that consequently correct political decisions were to be made only by rational and not emotional appeal. Thus, the Election Commission scrupulously selected objects that could be intelligible as well as symbolically neutral to the majority of the population. Given India's dominating visual dimension, which is nonetheless culturally and more specifically religiously-bound, the Election Commission had to fall back on the selection of popular items and creatures. The bicycle, the clock, the elephant, the umbrella, the lamp, the star and so on became common electoral and party symbols [Fig 4 – First List of Symbols].

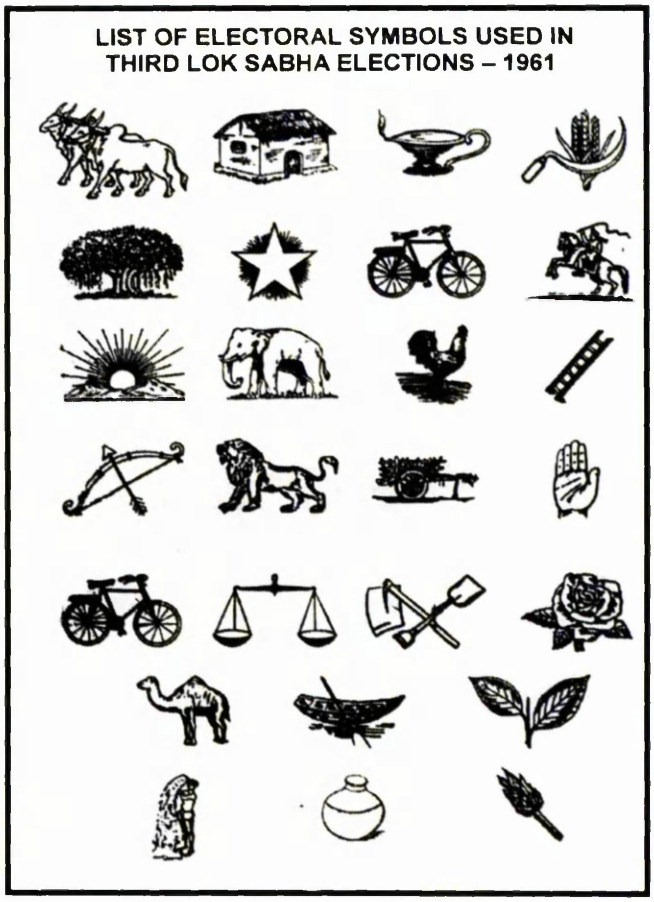

Fig. 4. 1961 List of Electoral Symbols

It is clear that a concern for the correct functioning of electoral procedures directed the choice of the Election Commission. The aim of the electoral symbols was not to 'symbolise' the ideology of the candidate or the party they were representing, but to simplify voting procedures for the illiterate masses. These images were not elements for the synthetic evocation of broad belief systems and of political doctrines. If anything, being bare markers, at least in the first years of India's independence, they were aimed at making a good impression on the people in order to win their support and sympathies. That is why their intelligibility was considered paramount. And that is also the reason why in a country like India, which is still predominantly agricultural, the majority of the pictorial representations listed by the Election Commission are derived from the agricultural world, especially in the first approved list. The two

yoked bullocks, the shaft of wheat and sickle, the cultivator winnowing grain, the hut, the pitcher, the cock, the spade and stoker, the camel and the elephant were all objects and creatures that play a significant role in the life of the majority of the Indian population in their day-to-day work in the fields.

Also, the symbols system of voting guaranteed the participation of all sections of society in the democratic process, thus mirroring the country's commitment to the democratic and secular ideals expressed in the preamble of the Constitution. Adherence to these obligations, meant that the use of religious symbolism had to be abandoned not simply as an endorsement of India's pledge to the principle of secularism but also as demonstration of the belief that traditional and religious cultural alliances stood in the way of the country's advancement. The choice of bare pictorial representations of everyday objects devoid of any emotional significance became the only available option.

India's electoral system is only one of many lower-order symbols of India's political system. Others will be briefly considered. Concepts of progress, development, modernity, democracy and secularism were also transmitted by a whole set of state institutions and policies. For instance, the Indian Army became another important carrier of Nehruvian ideology. Indeed, Nehru was aware that the Indian army was moved by strong feelings of comradeship, where parochial attachments to caste, credo or family were belittled when confronted to the vow to serve the nation first[24]. Thus, in independent India, the army became a breeding ground for national integration, turning into a visible, living symbol of what India should be like: strong, disciplined, united and integrated. Its prominent role in India's foremost national public ritual – Republic Day Parade – further demonstrates this.

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[24] Constituent Assembly Debates, 22 July 1947.

The imagined nation was also symbolised by India's economic planning. The Five-Year Plans became the symbol of India's collective endeavour, of progress, modernisation, scientific advancement and development. In particular, economic planning, emphasising a common economic life offered the basis for societal unity. Economy has always featured prominently in India's nationalist discourse perhaps due to colonial exploitation. In Chapter 2 it was shown how, during the anti-colonial movement, *khadi* acquired an iconic status exposing underlying concepts of indigenousness, traditional heritage and regional diversity. Similarly, the Five-Year Plans became core symbols of Nehruvian nationalism. The extent of the influence of the symbol of planned economy in independent India can be appreciated if one looks at how, for instance, the idiomatic language of economic planning permeated official and commercial advertisements in the 1950s and 1960s [see later for more details].

Economic achievements and developing infrastructures are consistent and regular features of Nehruvian iconography. As Deans argues, examining the iconography of Taiwanese stamps:

> "These images serve to promote both a particular vision of the past and the future with a view to shaping identity as well as celebrating the success and virtue of the leadership, thereby promoting its legitimacy. (...) the impression carried is clearly one celebrating (...) modernity and technological sophistication" [Deans 2005:25].

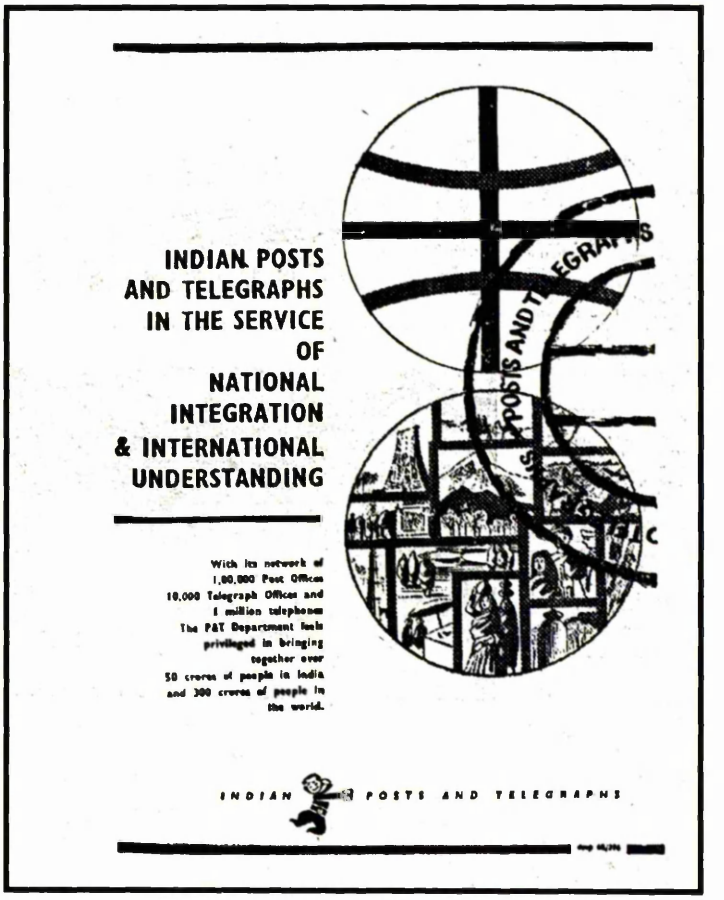

Fig. 5 Indian Post Office Pubblicity for National Integration

The use of this imagery both as a vehicle for identity-building and as a mechanism of legitimation becomes particularly evident if one analyses the commemorative set of stamps issued by the Indian Post Office in 1955[25]. The Five-Year

[25] Incidentally, the Indian Post Office itself can be reckoned among India's political symbols of the regime. As many other national institutions, the Indian Post Office became a symbol of national unity [Fig. 5] and a mark of modernity and sovereignity. This marked a change from the previous period, as in colonial India the stamps issued by the British Government of India could only be a symbol of unity within the British Empire and only for the provinces under direct British rule. In fact, the princely states retained the power to issue their own stamps. At the same time, the stamps issued by the Indian Post Office framed an image of national identity that was effectively relayed to the Indian public and to the outside world.

Plan Series, issued when the First Five-Year Plan was drawing to a close and released on the 26th of January 1955 – the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Indian Republic – celebrates India as an economic nation. The Five-Year Plan Series featured a number of engraved images of India's most prominent economic successes both in the industrial and the agricultural sector and ranged from the Hindustan Aircraft Factory to the image of an unspecified power loom. The eight *anna* stamp bears a picture of the engine being built at the Chittaranjan Locomotive works [Fig. 6], while the five rupees one carries a picture of the fertiliser factory at Sindri, the first public sector enterprise completed by the newly independent state and the largest of its kind in Asia, inaugurated by Nehru himself in 1952 [Nehru 1986:571] [Fig.7]. The Sindri fertiliser factory became a very popular sign of India's development, so popular that, as a commentator put it, 'it looked as if a new India was taking shape, and Sindri was providing a model for it' (Roy, 2003). Another remarkable symbol of India's economic development was the Tilaiya dam[26], reproduced on the one *anna* stamp [Fig. 8]. Indeed, dams became one of the most iconic signs in the Nehruvian symbolic repertoire [on this, see more later]. As it will be shown in the following section, the Indian Post Office significantly contributed to the process of nation building. Besides helping defining India's national identity, the stamps issued by the Indian Post Office in the first years of India's independence also became vehicles for the transmission of nationalism. Stamps iconography can easily transmit the values of official nationalism creating and enforcing images of the nation. Indeed, postal stamps – as well as banknotes and coins – are particularly good media for the transmission of 'banal nationalism' [Billig 1995]

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[26] The Tilaiya Dam, which is 30 metres high and 366 metres long, has 14 lock gates a capacity of storing 394.74 million cubic metres. It is the first project that was undertaken by the Damodar Valley Corporation across the Barakar river. The construction of the dam began in January 1950 and was completed in February 1953. The dam also houses a hydroelectric power station. A tourist complex has been built around the Dam, with a Whispering Island in the lake, a crocodile project, and a deer park. The Whispering Island, which is a picnic spot, has been renamed as Chacha Nehru Island after the Jawaharlal Nehru.

on account of their being items of everyday use by all sections of the population[27]. Aware of the stamps' crucial role in the programme of nation building as vehicles for identity creation and propagation, Nehru declared that stamps "should not only be artistic in design but must also represent the history and character of the people. They should be beautiful symbols of a nation's emotions and aspirations" [SWJN 5:412].

Fig. 6 Chittaranjan Stamp

Fig. 7 Sindri Stamp

Fig. 8 Tilaya Stamp

Another remarkable sign of Nehruvian nationalism was the programme of Indianisation or nationalisation of the national landscape: that is, the efforts of the post-independent state to inscribe the national landscape with symbols transmitting Nehruvian themes of development, modernity, unity, secularism, national self-reliance and so on. This programme of nationalisation of the Indian landscape was implemented mainly in three ways: by the symbolic re-appropriation and de-colonisation of the national territory; by the establishment of key heavy industries, in keeping with the dominant development paradigm of the time; and lastly, by the creation of a large number of new towns that was dictated by a new spatial pattern of investment.

While in the existing Indian cities, squares and streets names were being nationalised and statues and monuments in honour of British royals and viceroys were

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[27] Despite a general neglect among the academic community of the study of postage stamps, several works have been published on stamps as vehicles for national identity-building and as mechanisms of regime legitimation. For a review of these works, see *East Asia* Special Number Summer 2005.

removed[28], and towering dams, imposing factories and other impressive engineering structures soon dotted the national landscape as perpetual reminders of Nehruvian paradigms. The foundation of new cities was possibly the most outstanding undertaking in the nationalisation of the Indian landscape. As the British chose the cities to functions as visible signs of the Raj and as sites of power to instil grandeur, so the post-colonial intelligentsia chose the city as the symbol of the new India, pulsating monuments to modernity. There were towns built for the rehabilitation of displaced persons (Faridabad, Nolokheri, Rajpura, Kalyani), administrative capitals (Chandigarh, Bhubaneshwar and Bilaspur, Gandhinagar, and TT Nagar), steel towns (Rourkela, Bhilai, Durgapur and Bhadravati, Bokaro), other industrial towns (Chittaranjan, Nangal, Mithapur, Dandeli, Ranchi, Pimpri, Jagannath Nagar and Deorvani Nagar), company towns: Modinagar, Neyveli, Kagaznagar, Sindri, Kotah, Baroda), oil towns and port towns (Barauni and Kandla). While the main drive behind this programme of intense urbanisation was to decentralise industrial development out of the traditional metropolitan regions – especially in backward areas – it also became a strong symbol not only of development but also of the principle of national unity, as regional inequality was perceived as a serious threat to Indian unity.

As the spatial categories identified by the post-independence town planners, and by the Public Work Department "provided a mechanism for the elimination of old as well as the construction of new identities" [King 1994:280], so other lower-order symbols of the Nehruvian political system contributed to the definition of India's post-colonial identity and to the process of nation-building.

Miranda of Nehruism

In the belief that images can be more effective than words and in order to clear the hurdles of illiteracy, a large number of images and audiovisual formats of publicity (murals, posters, hoardings, press advertisements, kiosks, means of transports,

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[28] For a detailed account of the nationalisation of Lutyens' Delhi, see Gupta [1994]

matchboxes and photos, cartoons, maps, drawings, graphs, charts, sketches) were regularly employed to bring education and 'enlightenment' and to motivate the people. The search for a visual idiom that could work also without words was evident from the family planning campaign and the choice of electoral symbols analysed earlier on. In the following section, I examine the official visual vocabulary that dominated India's discourse on the nation. The majority of the data studied in this section was published by the units of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, often on behalf of other government departments and ministries. However, this data will be complemented by an analysis of the visual language employed by the Indian Post Office and by a study of the iconography of Indian banknotes and coins.

In general, illustrations can be both didactic and explicative of the text they accompany. Because in illustrating a text – with photographs, cartoons, drawings and even with moving images – there is always a large number of pictures one can opt for, the selection of a particular set of illustrations instead of another can be extremely significant as it could provide insight into the image of India that these publications aimed to project. In the 1950s and 1960s many publications issued by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting were equipped with illustrations. These types of illustrated texts became very popular and were often called pictorial surveys. Pictorial surveys often were printed on glossy paper, but they rarely used colour photographs. Like other similar government publications, the illustrations selected for this type of titles were characterised by an underlying intention to show the new India *in fieri*. Often the titles of these publications evoked ideas of change, progress and of movement forward.

The illustrations seem to fall into a set number of categories that are typical of this Nehruvian imagery. To the first category belong those images – photographs or illustrations – whose intent was to represent India's industrial achievements and engineering successes. Images of dams – either already operational or under

construction, of hydroelectric and power stations, and pictures of factories, of factory workers happy in their new occupation (presumably happy for their contribution to India's resurgence and development) abound in all government official publicity material and are probably the most popular ones. The Bhakra Dam project became perhaps one of the most common images of its kind [Fig 9].

Fig. 9 Bhakra Nangal

This project was part of a multi-purpose plan being undertaken by the state for the improvement of irrigation facilities and to supply power to industries, while providing a reliable flood control system. The Bhakra Dam was the first of its kind[29] and was usually widely displayed in this genre of handbooks of India. Dams became a particularly powerful symbol of the project of modernisation and development and icons of scientific progress. Inaugurating the Bhakra Nangal works, Nehru [1980:214] likened this feat of engineering to

> "the biggest temples and mosque and gurudwara [...] where man works for the good of mankind", and wondered, "[W]hich place can be greater than this, this Bhakra Nangal, where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be a greater and holier place than this, which we can regard as higher?"

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[29] Other projects include the Hirakud, the Tilaiya, the Tungabhadra and the Damodar Valley.

Such was their symbolism that the 100 Rupees note issued between 1962 and 1967 carrying a picture of the Bhakra Nangal on the reverse [Fig 10][30]. In the 1960s the DAVP produced a large number of documentary films on India's hydroelectric and irrigation projects.

Fig. 10 Rs. 100 Banknote 1962-1967

Films such as *Temples of Tomorrow* [1961] and *Symbol of Progress* [1961] and *Symbol of Prosperity* [1961] "evoking the faith and devotion of millions who are working on these dams to harness the bounties of nature and ensure a better future for the people of this country"[31] are typical examples of this. Dams of modern India became emblems of economic accomplishment obtained through collective sacrifice and cooperation, and therefore symbols of societal unity. A significant advertisement issued by the government and published in *India: A Reference Annual 1953* explains how large engineering projects like the great dams are hotbed for national integration and unity. In this advertisement, entitled "One country One People Together they

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[30] An advertisement issued by the DAVP in 1961 invited Indian citizens to write to the Punjab Government Tourist Bureau to get help with the planning of a visit to this contemporary 'place of pilgrimage in the era of Reconstruction' [*India: A Reference Annual 1961*].

[31] Films Division *Films Division Catalogue of Films 1949-1972*:198.

Work" a sketch of a manual worker is pictured beside a photograph of a large bridge building site [Fig. 11].

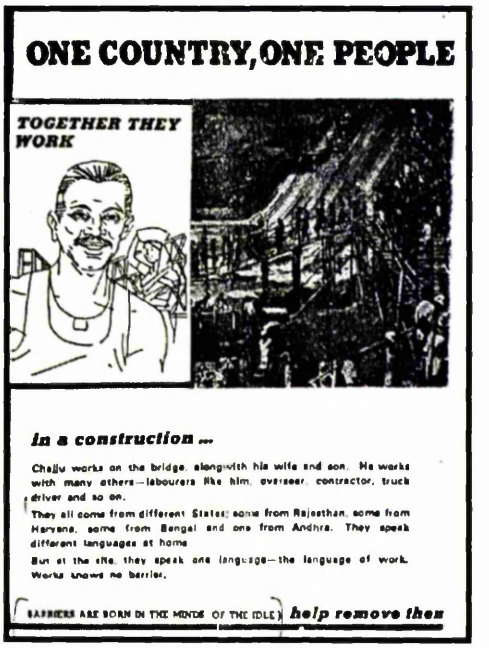

Fig. 11 One Country One People

The multitudes of people seen at work in the photograph and the caption that stress the importance of labour, intend to show how working together for the national project creates unity, as it helps removing barriers. Beside being images of societal unity and national integration, for Khilnani:

> "these dams – like the gleaming steel and power plants at Bokaro and Bhilai which the Soviets, Germans and British were all crowding in to help build – embodied the vision of modernity to which India had committed itself. They were the spectacular facades, luxurious in their very austerity, upon which the nation watched expectantly as the image of its future was projected. It was a big, audacious image. India, it promised, would become an industrial giant." [1997:62]

Agricultural development and modernisation is another major category of the nationalist imagery of Nehruvian India. Illustrations belonging to this category show images of plants and crops obtained thanks to the use of fertilisers, to the

mechanisation of agriculture, and to irrigation programmes. In other words, these images visually represent the modernisation of Indian agriculture. While photographs such as *Power on the Farm* [Fig 12] are images that allude to the blend of modernity and tradition that characterised Nehru's India (showing how the Bhakra-Nangal system provided "power for this Punjabi farmer to pump well water for field irrigation. His old Persian wheel (..) once turned by bullocks, may also be power-driven"[32]), another recurrent image in this category is that one of the farmer looking proudly at his bumper crop or contemplating the better quality of cotton or wheat obtained thanks to the mechanisation and modernisation of agriculture. A photograph shows a farmer proudly looking at a shaft of wheat with the caption: "(...) [A] north Indian farmer proudly displays the prize wheat crop he obtained by using better seeds and fertilisers"[33] [Fig.13].

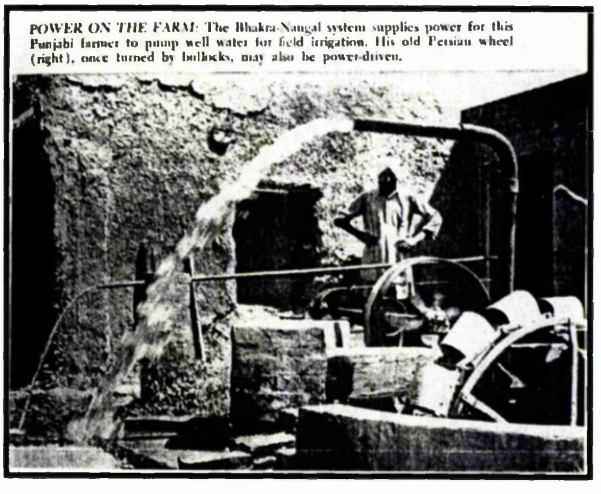

Fig. 12 Power on the Farm

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[32] In *The New India- Progress Through Democracy*, Planning Commission, Government of India, 1958: 24

[33] *Facts About India*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India. New Delhi: Publication Division 1957:35

Fig. 13 Proud Farmer with bumper crop

Another publication called *Era of Rapid Change 1947-1967* shows similar images accompanied by the following caption: "A veritable revolution has been wrought in the field of agriculture. Modern farming practices have been rapidly and extensively adopted. A farmer uses chemical fertilizer to speed the growth and increase the productivity of his rice paddies". Photographs of the large Sindri fertiliser factory [Fig 14] were also ubiquitous, and were reproduced on the set of stamps that celebrated the First Five-Year Plan as it was shown above.

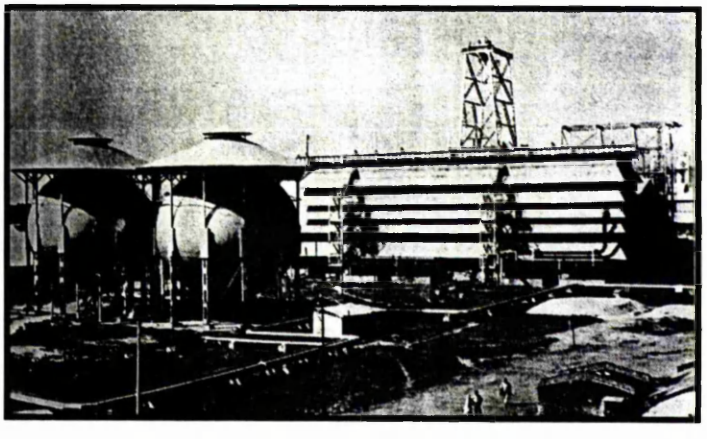

Fig. 14 Sindri Fertiliser Factory

The typical iconography of the content farmer – but this argument could also easily apply to other images and photographs where Indians are their subjects – conjures images of bucolic idyllic cooperation where no hint to hardship is done. Rather, working for independent India and for the planned economy is shown to be joyful and inspiring. Often faces glow with pride and nationalist fervour. This iconography brings to mind Nehru's following remarks made in praising of the accomplishments of community projects:

> "Apart from the practical results which have been achieved, (...) there is something even more important (...). This (...) factor is the spirit of the people, the removal of inertia in thought and action, the development of a team spirit in national work and the sense of partnership of the people in great undertakings. This represents the new dynamism which is so essential to all progress. It means a social revolution in our ways of life and work which is creeping gradually but surely over the vast land of India. It is because of this that the Community Projects and the National Extension Service have become, more than anything else, the symbols of the resurgent spirit of India" [34]

The Indian Republic Series of stamps issued in 1950 to celebrate the inauguration of the Indian Republic and the new Constitution uses this iconographic language. Portraits of the Indian common man and woman are shown looking optimistically into the future while the images drawn in the background pay homage to India's culture (ink, well and verse), agricultural traditions (sheaf of wheat and plough), cottage industries (spinning wheel and cloth) and to the nation itself (rejoicing crowds) [Fig 15]. Incidentally, the ear of corn or sheaf of wheat became another important symbol of Independent India. Besides figuring prominently in the 4 *Anna* Indian Republic Series commemorative stamps, it was also engraved on the reverse of the 1 Rupee and half Rupee coins issued in 1950 [Fig. 16].

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[34] Jawaharlal Nehru, to the Fourth Development Commissioners' Conference, Simla, May 1955. Quoted in *The New India*...1958:179.

Fig.15 1950 Inauguration of India's Republic Commemorative Stamps

Fig. 16 1950 Rs. ½ and 1 Coins

The sheaf of wheat is a symbol of harvest signifying prosperity and representing India's farming traditions. With time it was widely reproduced on commercial advertisements publicising items directed at India's farming community. Typical advertisements of this kind would employ the iconography of the content farmer discussed above, this time promoting along with the ideals of progress, development and modernisation a particular product (Dunlop pneumatic tyres, Ajeet Oil Engine, and McCormick tractors) [Fig 17].

Fig. 17 Advertisements for McCormick Tractors, Ajeet Oil and Dunlop India

Another popular category of images depicts the development of transport industries. Images showing road construction works, launching of ships, locomotives, airplanes, car factories, all belong to this group. A very popular picture in these early government publications is the one depicting the launching of ships at Visakhapatnam,

[fig 18] one of India's largest shipyards and the launching of Jala Usha, India's first Indian built modern vessel[35]. The Chittaranjan locomotive works of West Bengal [Fig 19] completed during the first Five Year Plan was often used to epitomise progress in the transport sector. Indian infant automobile industry – usually represented with images of its assembly chain – and the Hindustan Aircraft factory of Bangalore were popularly reproduced as well. The latter were also reproduced in the First Five-Year Plan commemorative stamps.

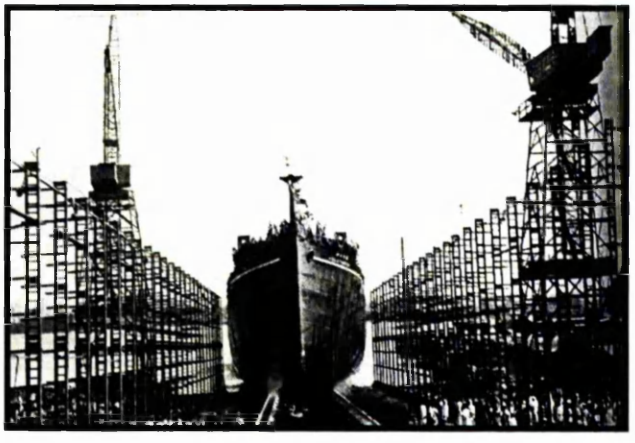

Fig. 18 Launching of Ship at Visakhapatnam

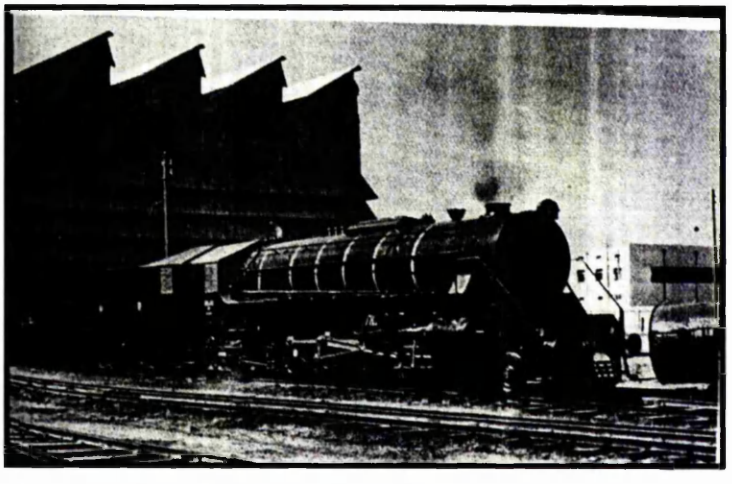

Fig. 19 Chittaranjan Locomotive Works

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[35] *The Second Year,* Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publication Division 1949.

Images of rural development belong to another popular category. Photographs of villages with extensive drainage systems, images of rural vaccination programmes for people and livestock; illustrations of construction of new wells, roads and schools; pictures of artisans engaged in their arts – as part of the encouragement of cottage and small scale industries – or stills of mobile medical centres, were all meant to visually represent improvements in the life of India's villages [Fig 20]. Education was also the focus of special attention: village schools for children and adults; universities and research institutes were widely reproduced. This type of illustrations, despite not being one of the largest categories, was a symbol of the changing face of India, encapsulating the Nehruvian faith in rationalism and in scientific knowledge. Typically, illustrations belonging to this category would include photographs of students working at microscopes or engineers at work at industrial plants. Young girls and female students were often included in this category symbolising not only the spread of education but also its role for the emancipation of women.

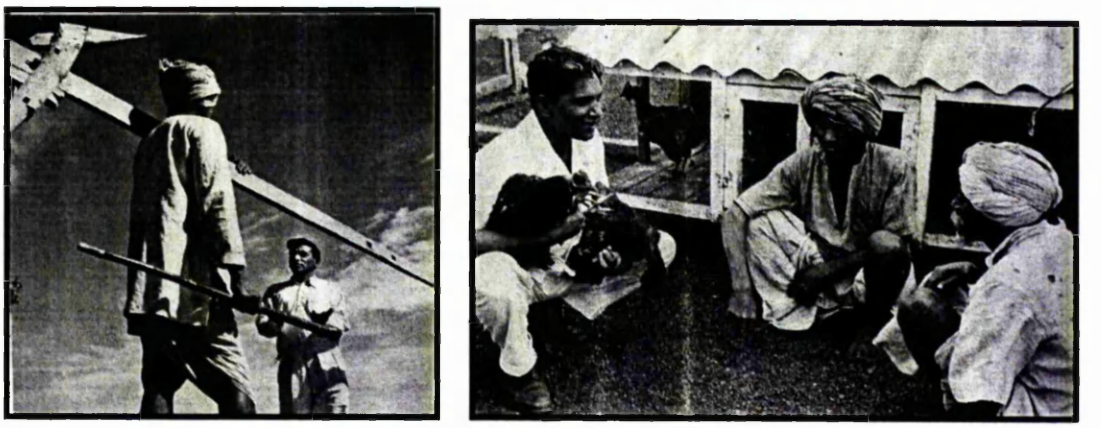

Fig. 20 Community Officers at work

The people represented in these photographs are usually young males[36]. Their outlook – with the exception of those photographs of the countryside – is totally modern and there is nothing that distinguishes them from their contemporaries in other parts of the developed world. These are the new Indians: upbeat, hardworking, enthusiastic and wholly modern. With them the country will surely move forward, seems to be the unwritten caption to these types of images. While on the contrary, the country folk are still traditional-looking in their dresses, outlook and lifestyles, they are as crucial to India's development as the modern city folk and they often are the main subject matter of the illustrations. Despite their traditional outlook, the rural masses – often epitomised by the image of the agricultural labourer – are depicted participating to the programme of national development in great earnest. The common man and woman thus become the unexpected heroes of this Nehruvian symbolic system.

There is however another hero of Nehruism who is often portrayed in a large number of official publications: the technocrat, or the extended community officer[37] – as the government publications used to call them. Often these pictures portrayed extended officers discussing development programmes with the farmers, the workers, and with the representatives of *panchayati raj*. But besides being the personification of the government and of its development policies, these technocrats were also the personifications of the institutions of the post-colonial state and of its reach into the deepest corners of India. Moreover, the contrast between the extended officers and the rural folks – symbolised primarily by their respective clothing and their body-language

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[36] The image of the young person is a symbol of the rejuvenation and rebirth of India. Elaborating on the symbolism of youth, Nehru is quoted to have said, commenting on community development programs: "Something life-giving went to them ... A process of rejuvenation set in" [*New India* 1958:175]. The same book also says, "Many villagers have been heard to say 'We were dead, and now we are live (sic)'"[ibid].

[37] Discussing community development programmes, *New India* says: "The key agent at the village level is the multi-purpose village worker, a young male, usually with high-school education or better, who has been especially trained in rural extension work. Young women are beginning to be used to do home extension work with farm wives and families" [*New India* 1958:170]

(the extended officer gesticulating and explaining, the peasant usually still and listening) – connoted a set of dichotomies (urban/rural, educated/illiterate, and modern/traditional) whose combination was at the core of Nehru's India [Fig. 20].

Another feature of the Nehruvian symbolic repertoire was the continuation of the pre-independence practice of sacralisation of nationalist heroes and martyrs that was discussed in Chapter 2. With independence the pantheon of nationalist martyrs was expanded and institutionalised. Publications such as *Builders of Modern India* – a very popular series published by the Publication Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting – and those DAVP films dedicated to India's freedom fighters and national leaders contributed to the iconisation of these heroes. As the R R Diwakar, the general editor of the series, claimed in the preface, *Builders of Modern India* was born "to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence".

There were many heroes[38] but only one father of the nation: Gandhi. Gandhi's portraits graced not only the Congress party section headquarters throughout the country but his was the very first painting to be hung in the Central Hall of Parliament. Such was his iconic status that a portrait of Gandhi was considered to replace the image of King George VI from India's banknotes in the first years after independence and preliminary sketches were also prepared to that effect[39]. In the end, the Sarnath Capital was chosen as the symbol to be reproduced on India's banknotes [see Fig. 1 and 2]. But a commemorative series was eventually issued to celebrate Gandhi's birth centenary in 1969. Here Gandhi was pictured seated with the Sevagram Ashram in the background. The apotheosis of Gandhi on India's banknotes was finally reached when

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[38] Wyatt [n.d.] pointedly argues that a number of industrialists were also celebrated as national heroes. He notes how for instance Jamsetji Tata – the founder of the Tata Corporation – was commemorated on stamps in 1958 and in 1965.

[39] http://www.rbi.org.in/currency/museum/p-rep.html accessed on 5 March 2006.

new Mahatma Gandhi Series was issued in 1996. His frontal portrait is reproduced on all the banknote denominations and has in the end superseded the Asokan Lion capital as the central symbol on India's banknotes.

Gandhi was also the first Indian to be celebrated on postal stamps. A set of commemorative stamps was issued in his honour in 1948 after his death. In fact, the idea of issuing a set of four Gandhi stamps was originally agreed immediately after independence. Trial copies were also submitted. But with Gandhi's sudden death the sketches had to be changed and the design for four mourning stamps was prepared. On Nehru's suggestion, the word 'Bapu' was included both in Hindu and in Urdu, a symbolic gesture towards communal harmony[40] [Fig. 21]. In 1969, Gandhi's birth centenary, another series of commemorative stamps, postcards, and postal stationery was issued. First day covers were issued with a special *charkha* cancellation [Fig. 22] and special inland letters carried a picture of the Mahatma and the untouchability slogan in Hindi and English "Untouchability is a crime against god and man". A special Gandhi and Nehru series of stamps was then issued in 1973. From then onwards, Gandhi will regularly appear on India's stamps: to celebrate the International Year of Child [1979], the 50th anniversary of the Salt March [1980], the 50th anniversary of the Quit India Resolution [1992], on Gandhi's 125th birth anniversary [1994], on his 50th death anniversary [1998], for the 50th anniversary of the Republic [2000] and finally in 2001 to celebrate Gandhi as the man of the millennium. The celebration of Gandhi's birthday (2 October) became the only Indian secular holiday dedicated to a personality to be included in the official calendar of national holidays.

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[40] http://www.stampsofindia.com/readroom/b013.htm accessed on 5 March 2006.

Fig. 21 1948 Gandhi's commemorative stamps

Fig. 22 1969 Gandhi's Birth Centenary First Day Cover with special *Chakra* cancellation

Gandhi had already become an important symbol of the identity of anti-colonial movement and of India's national unity in life. With his sudden death threatening the unity of India, to keep this symbolism alive, Gandhi's *samadhi* became India's foremost national monument to which national and foreign dignitaries pay their respects in highly symbolic ceremonies and occasions. Indeed, according to Kertzer [1988] the symbolic identification of the nation with a heroic figure is more common and important in new postcolonial regimes dominated by a single party. Because

> "the creation of a new nation requires a massive effort at symbolic construction [and] give the difficulty people with no previous conception of national identity have in making the notion symbolically real to themselves, it is not surprising that such efforts often involve creation of personified images of the state". [Kertzer 1988:178]

Thus, illustrations were projecting recurrent themes of development, progress, and modernity revealing India's fundamental character. Aural, visual and verbal stimuli concurred to create a pervasive idea of progress and development, and to depict a glorious image of the future. However, the concept of unity in diversity was another important feature common to a great deal of these publications and also of documentaries, and radio shows.

Representing the concept of Unity in Diversity through words and images

The slogan "Unity in Diversity" became the most popular symbol of Nehruism. A variety of publications – where images of the various regions and people of India were copiously reproduced – gave shape to this concept. Because according to Nehruism, unity in India was not equivalent to homogeneity, but was based on a common culture, itself composed by the different elements of India's social and cultural traditions, these publications obviously aimed at portraying the different people, cultures and regions of India as legitimately belonging to the basic *fabric of India*[41] and are an excellent illustrative example of the adherence to a concept of territorial nationalism and of the state's effort in propagating a particular kind of national identity.

According to these publications India's national identity is composite, as "India, like many other countries, is a mosaic of many races and cultures"[42]. By presenting a panorama of different races and costumes, these publications aimed at stressing India's *unity in diversity* rather than an imaginary cultural uniformity. Typical photographs and illustrations belonging to this category portrayed India's natural features and its people. Publications such as *India in Maps* and *India – a Pictorial Survey* are illustrative

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[41] This was indeed the title of one of the publications released by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

[42] Introduction, *Facts About India*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India. New Delhi: Publication Division.1957.

of this and aimed at becoming "what every Indian should be proud to own"[43]. Aerial photographs of the Himalayas and of the southernmost corner Kanya Kumari, plus a selection of faces that ranged from "A typical Peasant in Bihar, a Cultivator from Haryana, A saucy girl from Kerala, a Sikkimese Belle, a rural couple from Rajastan, an Anglo-Indian, a landless labourer (who has now been saved from the clutches of money-lenders and given land to cultivate and a loan to built his house)"[44] aimed at showing India's diversities while stressing their integration within the folds of India's national life.

The map of independent India was a powerful graphic symbolic marker of Indianness and of the concept of unity in diversity and was widely reproduced in a large number of government publications. Often these maps did not include internal boundaries but only its international borders thus proclaiming the fundamental and enduring unity of India. In 1957 the Indian Post Office issued a Map of India Series of stamps. This series carried the picture of the geographical map of India sketching its main mountain ranges and river systems with a decorative motive on the left-hand side [Fig.23].

Fig. 23 1957 Stamp Map of India Series

Being such a powerful symbol of the nation, it is surprising – as Wyatt [2005] rightly observes – that it took independent India ten years to issue this stamp series.

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[43] From advertising in *Yojana*, 1968.

[44] *Facts About India.* Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India. New Delhi: Publication Division. 1957.

This is even more remarkable if one considers that with partition the map of India that had become popular during the nationalist movement (as it was shown in Chapter 2) had dramatically changed its outline. The two wings of the state of Pakistan were literally carved out of the seamless territory of pre-partition India.

Despite this shortcoming, the Indian Post Office had already contributed to the promotion of the ideal of unity in diversity by issuing the Archaeological Series of Stamps on 15 August 1949, the second anniversary of India's independence. The 16 stamps of different denominations carried engraved images of India's most important sites of historic heritage [Fig. 24].

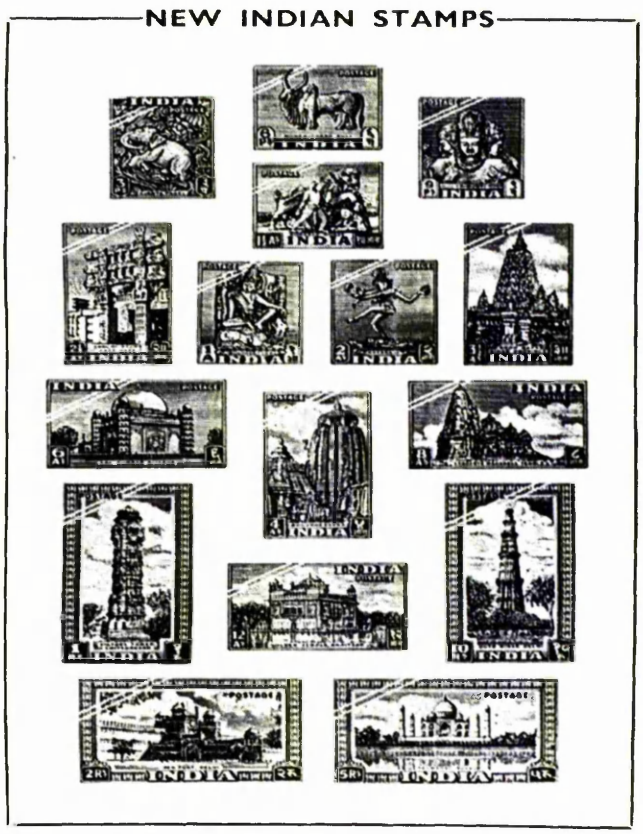

Fig. 24 1948 Stamps Archaeological Series

In a multicultural and plurireligious country like India it is the selection of images that is most significant. Monuments belonging to India's major denominations

and civilisations were chosen. Viewed all together in an imaginary journey across India's geography and history, these stamps told the story of India's civilisation. Thus, by portraying the singular contributions of Hindu, Islamic, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain cultures and civilisations to the make-up of modern India, this series of stamps portrayed an image of India as a multicultural and multi-religious nation.

Other visual devices were used to represent unity in diversity. An advertisement issued by the DAVP carries an image of a composite earthen lamp [Fig. 25].

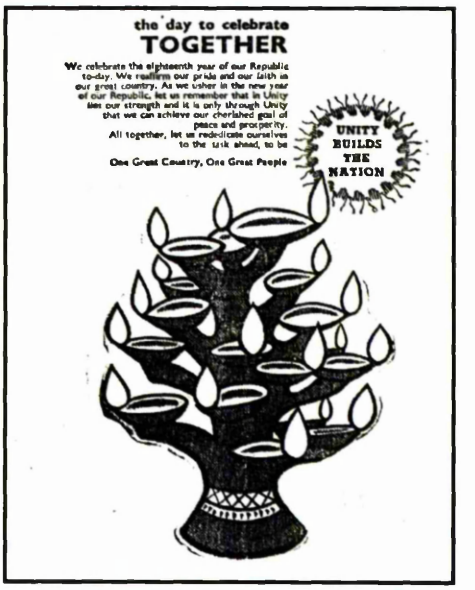

Fig. 25 DAVP Advertisement Celebrating Unity

The earthen lamp (a traditional and familiar Indian object) in the shape of a tree is made up by many distinct lamps thus signifying oneness and distinctiveness at the same time. Another pictorial device symbolising unity in diversity is pictured on the right-hand side. A number of hands create a circle. Within the circle is inscribed the motto 'Unity builds the Nation'. If the pictorial devices were not eloquent enough, the captions accompany the visuals further corroborate those claims.

The Indian Railways, too, contributed to the promotion of unity in diversity. An advert issued by the DAVP carries a picture of an eight-spokes wheel within whose segments are inserted the portraits of some of India's diverse ethnic groups pictured dressed in their traditional clothes [Fig. 26].

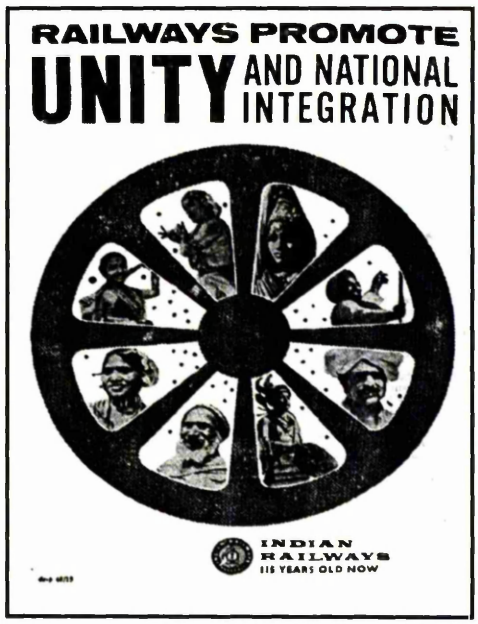

Fig. 26 DAVP Advertisement for Indian Railways

The connotations triggered by this symbolic image are manifold. The wheel that occupies the main portion of the advert on one level is a symbol of the railways whose wheels are crossing and linking the whole nation. On another level, the wheel is also a reproduction of the Asokan wheel that features prominently both in the centre of India's national flag and on its national emblem. As it was noted above, the wheel was central element of Asokan symbolism. Asoka was known by the epithet *chakravartin* the all-conquering monarch 'whose wheels are rolling everywhere without obstruction'. Thus, in this context the wheel symbolises unity, just rule, movement and, by extension, progress.

The Asokan wheel also appears in the last advert examined here. The advert was issued on Mahatma Gandhi's birth centenary and bore the caption 'One Nation: One People' [Fig.27].

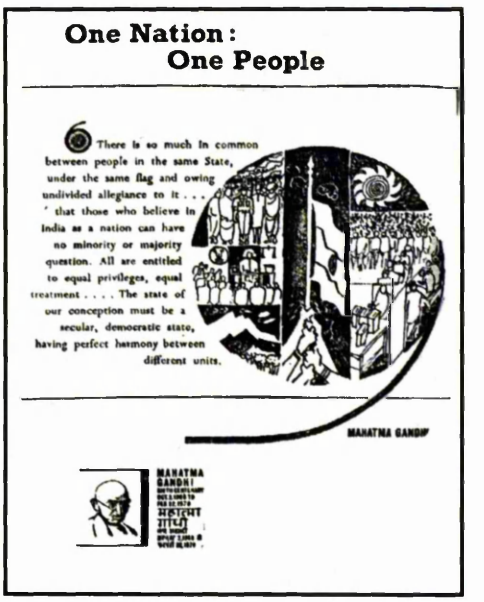

Fig. 27 Advertisement Commemorating Gandhi's Birth Centenary

The Asokan wheel here is faithfully reproduced and it is used as a fancy inverted comma for one Gandhi's quote which significantly reads:

> "There is so much in common between people in the same State, under the same flag and owing undivided allegiance to it [...] the state of our conception must be a secular, democratic state, having perfect harmony between different units."

Commercial Advertisement

The use of such nationalist narratives was not just confined to government propaganda. Indeed, they even influenced the language (visual and verbal) of popular cinema and commercial advertisements that appeared both in the national press and in several governmental publications too. In the 1950s and 1960s government and commercial advertisements were remarkably similar, with commercial advertisement

adopting the verbal and visual idiomatic language of development, progress, and modernisation of government publicity. These advertisements tended towards a celebration of India and of her achievements. Publicising a variety of disparate commodities, they provided a promising picture of India's present development, future industrialisation and her drive towards modernisation.

Verbally, advertisements of the period were liberally employing key words that epitomised development and encapsulated the concept of modernisation Words such as development, progress, modern, industrial strength, ahead, new, tomorrow, five-year plans, national and self-sufficiency were common. These concepts were then visually translated in images of progress. This was usually done by depicting industrial machinery, tractors, cogwheels, dams, electricity pylons, modern means of transport, and factories. As it was pointed out above, both these registers (the verbal and the visual) were a common feature of the official Nehruvian language and were clearly derived from it. Although prima facie these similarities seem quite unexpected, they become less so if one considers that advertisement – either governmental or private – in a developing country such as India was intended to play the same decisive role

> "(...) in motivating people towards greater achievements in all fields of life and in bringing about desirable changes in their behaviour, attitudes and norms. (...) (A)dvertising has to help increase production, promote new ideas and practices conducive to progress and bring about economic and social transformation."[45]

Take for instance the publicity for *ACC. The Cement Marketing Company of India Ltd*[46] where pictures of the symbolic landmarks of Nehruvian India discussed above

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[45] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. *Mass Media in India*. Research and Reference Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. New Delhi: Publication Division, 1980: 63-64

[46] *India a Reference Annual 1953*

such as the Bhakra-Nangal Dam, the Sindri Fertiliser Factory help promoting ACC Cement [Fig.28].

Fig. 28 ACC Cement Marketing Company of India

In a similar fashion, Lipton – the tea company – published an advertisement to celebrate India's fourth Independence Day [Fig 29].

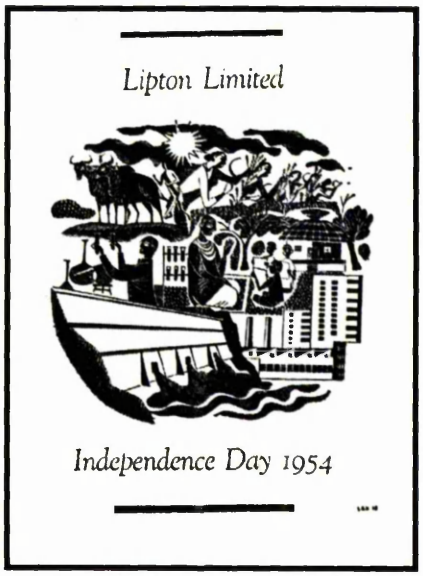

Fig. 29 Lipton Tea Advertisement Celebrating India's Independence Day

The picture carried a composite representation of modern India that combined in one representational plane different pictures of rural and industrial India. An image of a dam (Bhakran-Nangal?) dominates the foreground along with the picture of a

chemical engineer, of a factory and of a high-rise building. The middle part of the picture is dominated by an image of a village school. In the background, two yoked bullocks plough a field while several women harvest a wheat crop[47].

T.I. Cycles of India Limited, of Madras, described itself as "The Progressive National Bicycle industry in South India". *New India Assurance Co. Ltd* stated "Now, for the first time in this country introducing Machinery and Erection Insurance, to protect the Nation's industrial Assets". *Sen Raleigh Industries of India Limited* another bicycle factory, had a central caption to its advertisement stating: "Fulfilling a National Need". The caption in the *Automobile Products of India Ltd* advert read: "In the forefront of India's transport development. (...) Automobile Products of India. An Indian Enterprise *Forging Ahead*".

Fig. 30 Calendar Poster

[47] A popular poster of the time uses a similar synthetic visual language to picture on the same representational level agricultural and industrial development [Fig. 30]

Not surprisingly, advertisements for tractors, fertilisers, and machinery dominated the publicity landscape. The examples are multiple. *Kamani Engineering Corporation Limited* had the caption "In the service of industrial India" inscribed in a banner across the advertising space [Fig. 31].

Fig. 31 Kamani Advertisement

The advert showed images of presumably the Kamani headquarters, a Victorian-Gothic looking building, inscribed in a cimade up by a shaft of wheat and half a cogwheel. A bolt, symbol of electricity is pictured on the right-hand side of the cogwheel. A tractor ploughing the field and a power station surmounted by an electrical pylon complement the visual language again combining images of rural and industrial India. This synchretic iconography was employed in *Nicco Cables and Wires* advertisement in a novel way. Instead of juxtaposing images of industrial and rural India to represent the interaction of modern industry and traditional agriculture, this advert ingeniously represents this topic with the image of a young farmer holding a bunch of Nicco's wires with a shaft of wheat [Fig.32].

Fig. 32 Nicco Calbes and Wires

The caption "Raising a New Crop for New India" clearly mirrored not just the Nehruvian idiom and but promoted also ideals of modernity, development and change. The text that followed the caption further elaborated: "Nicco claims with pride that it has made its due contribution to India's "Produce or Perish[48]" campaign by supplying Cables & Wires for electrical development in the country".

The *Tata Iron & Steel Company Ltd* publicity figured images of rail carriages, dams, modern buildings, ships, and parts of engine – thus epitomising TATA participation in India's developmental programmes. Other advertisements promoted the new Indianness either by providing a syncretic vision of India and an imaginary consumer landscape or by inviting consumers to use and invest on Indian and local produces. In this, these types of advertisements were in keeping with Nehru's view of India.

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[48] "Produce or Perish" was the title of a series of AIR programs.

Sometimes advertisements featured graphs usually depicting a soaring curve (*Kassels Fans*) or production charts (*Hind Cycles Limited*). The latter can be taken as an example [Fig.33].

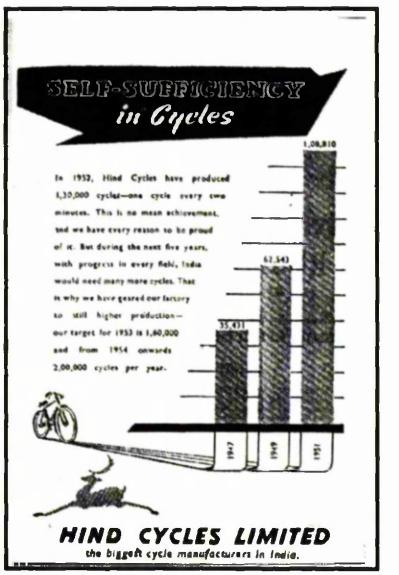

Fig. 33 Hind Cycles Ltd.

The text reproduced beside the production chart showing a visible increase in production for *Hind Cycles Limited* from 1947 to 1951, read as follow:

> "Self-sufficiency *in Cycles*. In 1952, Hind Cycles have produces 1,30,000 cycles – one cycle every two minutes. This is no mean achievement and we have every reason to be proud of it. But during the next five years, with progress in very field, India would need many more cycles. That is why we have geared our factory to still higher production – our target for 1953 is 1,20,000 and from 1954 onwards 2,00,000 cycles per year."

This advertisement employed a vocabulary that was optimistic; it promoted the development of the nation, embracing radical progress and faith in industrialisation and modernisation. The use of a technical language through the large use of numbers and graphs, alluded to scientific rationalism, while the wording recalled the one employed in the Five Year Plans. Besides promoting development, the underlying meaning of the advertisement was to show that a private company could be devoted to the welfare of the whole Indian nation as the government of India itself.

In other words, *Hind Cycles Limited* did not produce more bicycles for their own profit; but their increased production was in the public interest of the whole nation. The content of this advertisement seems to stress the concept that private interest was subordinated to the common welfare of the country as a whole, and that private and public enterprises could work together in the nation building process. Similarly, by reproducing the iconic image of the proud farmer portrayed with a shaft of wheat and the sickle – a trademark of Nehruism – in a variety of advertisements, other companies aimed at convey this particular message.

The language of commercial advertisement was positive, un-ambiguous, convincing (it did not raise any doubts in those who looked or listened) and reminiscent of the language of modernity and progress employed in government publicity. The company, the nation, and the people of India were all equally celebrated for their achievements. On the whole, this imagery, as well as Nehru's idiom, presented an ideal view of independent India, rather than just being an image of how India was. This strategy of picturing the ideal India characterised also a particular genre of the Hindi cinema of the 1950s, variously called nationalist or idealistic cinema. Originally the Indian state did not integrate the cinema industry in the nationalist planning frame because according to the government, commercial cinema was not considered prestigious enough. But already in 1950, the Government established a Film Enquiry Committee to "enable film in India to develop into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education and healthy entertainment"[49]. Thus, even commercial films were encouraged to play a decisive role in the articulation of nationhood despite the reluctance of the film industry to comply[50]. Eventually,

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[49] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. *Mass Media in India*. Research and Reference Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. New Delhi: Publication Division. 1978:66.

[50] In its report, the 1951 Patil Film Enquiry Committee noted not only a reluctance in the industry to produce such films but also the prevalence of the belief that "duties of a public nature are the exclusive province of the state and private individuals and bodies have no

commercial cinema was linked to the state and its development project through a series of ties: film policy, finance and subsidy policies, censorship, taxation, licensing regulations, awards, and film festivals following the belief of the time that:

> "[A] film while it is entertaining (...) can help re-adjusting attitudes, the relationship between different members of a family unit or of different communities in society and promote idealism or some ideology. It can develop ethical ideas, fairness and tolerance and even produce selflessness and sacrifice. (...) A film enlivens while it entertains, it teaches while it amuses, and it creates a world of impressions and ideas in which humanity at times seeks refuge from frustration, discontent and the hard realities of existence"[51].

However, some director, inspired by Italian neo-realism, wanted to document with their films India's social reality at this moment of transition. Films belonging to this genre depicted the lives of the common people, the problems of migration and urbanisation, and the disorientation and bewilderment of the country folk at their arrival in the great Indian metropolis[52]. But besides representing an objective rendering of contemporary India focusing on the existential problems of the masses and the impact that modernity and development was having on them, the Indian nationalist cinema provided the audiences with possible solutions to their problems and moral dilemmas. Moreover, by focusing on the everyday vicissitudes of the common people, the nationalist cinema contributed to the articulation of an ideal model of the Indian nation. It also aimed at inculcating values of citizenship, obeisance to the laws of the state, rejection of caste and religious prejudices, while promoting the ideal of personal sacrifice for the common good.

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responsibility or part to play". [*Report of the Film Enquiry Committee* 1951:43]. Commercial films of the 1950s and 1960s often reflected this Nehruvian vision.

[51] *Report of the Film Enquiry Committee* 1951:42.

[52] The city, in particular Bombay, become the privileged site of modernity, a place where traditional loyalties towards the family and the caste were shifted towards the less specific but more inclusive community of the nation, or towards even the more anonymous concept of the state, with its implacable laws in contrast with the conventions of tradition.

The opening scenes of possibly one of the most influential and typical film belonging to this genre[53], *Mother India*, replicated the visual idiom of Nehruvian progressive modernisation that appeared on all government publicity material. While the opening credits are rolling on, the camera sweeps on large construction works where large earth moving machines are at work. Electric pylons, cemented roads, tractors and cars crowd these opening scenes. The scene then switches to Radha, the heroine of the film, who, despite her personal tragedies, made enormous sacrifices for the advancement of the common good. It will be her, ideal citizen of modern India, who will inaugurate the irrigation works that have finally brought water to her village. All the trademark icons of the Nehruvian visual idiom so far discussed feature in these opening scenes: the dam, the electric pylons and power station, heavy machinery, cars, tractors, and a snapshot of traditional rural life. Later on, in one of the singing scenes (there are only a few in this film) the heroine persuades her village folks not to abandon the flooded fields but to work together to improve the land. She calls upon feelings of self-sacrifice and cooperation. Further, a sequence showing a map of India superimposed by the images of a multitude of peasant working the land significantly translate in an engaging visual language the much-valued principles of the time that only through hard work, self-sacrifice and cooperation for the well being of the whole nation that India can succeed. This Nehruvian iconic language dominated India's public culture and established the criteria that governed what was published in the press, seen in films and other electronic media, publicly displayed in popular posters [Fig. 31, 34 and 35] or even heard on the radio. It became truly hegemonic.

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[53]This cinematic genre produced a large number of outstanding pictures. However, due to the strictures of space, the analysis here has been necessarily brief. For a comprehensive account on this genre see: Chakravarty [1993].

Fig. 34 'Modern Age'. 1947 ca. Calendar Poster

Fig. 35 Mid-50s Calendar Poster

Demise of Nehru's Vision

Despite a strong commitment towards modernisation and progress and secularism, a very specific mixture of modern and traditional ideas formed the basis of Nehru's political ideology. Nehruism tried both to efface tradition from the self-representations of the state and to conjoin motifs that signified continuity with the past. In a way, indigenous traditions were only partly marginalized. The adoption of Asoka's symbolism for the national emblem and the national flag, the choice of the Red Fort as the site of official celebration of the nation, the choice of a suitable formal dress (black *achkan* and white *churidar pyjamas*) for ambassadors and other state personalities for ceremonies and other state functions [Choudhary 1984-1995: vol. 12, p.16] or the introduction of traditional elements in the official rituals that accompanied the transfer of power in 1947 – such as "the singing of songs associated with the freedom movements (...) the sounding not of the brass wind instruments beloved in British ceremonials but conch shells which related the event to Indian traditions" [Masselos 1990:40] – the support of *khadi* and handicrafts industries, the use of the Buddhist concept of *Panchsheela* as the basis of India's foreign policy, the design of the electoral symbols – the majority of which were originally derived from India's rural traditions – and even the promotion of India's cultural heritage all point to this direction. The widely held view of Nehruism as an enemy of traditions comes from the confusion between tradition and religion. Nehru was a staunch secularist but his critique did not extend to tradition in general. On the contrary, Nehru viewed traditions as partly providing the basis for change. In independent India, traditions could change from being instruments of oppression into agents of progress, economic development and social change. According to Kotari [1970:284], in post-independent India traditional symbols were used to legitimise changes. On the contrary, new symbols were employed to legitimise a reordering of traditional relations.

Indeed, Nehruism was successful (mainly through Nehru's steadfast vigilance and strong commitment to the principles upon which India, its identity and model of nationhood were fashioned)[54] in that it made its basic values and tenets *normative*. It stigmatised the opposites of its basic principles – such as communalism, religion, parochialism, traditionalism – so much so that it transformed them into political taboos. For a while (definitely till Nehru was alive) the grip of the values of his political culture was so compelling, that having the values of Nehruism become normative, being non-secular, or even having a different socio-economic programme equalled being anti-national. But in the end, Nehruism, however pervasive during his tenure as Prime Minister of India, was unable to create a long lasting national symbolic system that represented power, the nation and the people of India.

To a degree, it could be argued that the bankruptcy of Nehruvian symbolism was due to its being unintelligible to the Indian masses. It is often stated that India's post-colonial secular élites – of which Nehru was the foremost representative – tried to impose a secular ideology on their country that made little sense to most Indians. Accordingly, for Deshpande [2003], Nehru's symbolic repertoire was completely divorced from India's cultural traditions. Nehruvian developmentalism, modernism and scientific progress reduced the Indian nation to a space of production: "The nation [wa]s figured primarily as an economic space" and "visualized specifically as a community of patriotic producers". Thus, while Nehruism appeared to be extremely inclusive, Indian individuals had no particular cultural identity [Deshpande 2000:185].

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[54] Accordingly, political movements and ideologies based on ethnic values were repeatedly isolated. "As long as I am the Prime Minister of India, I shall fight them (Ram Rajiya Parishad, Bharatiya Jana Sangh and RSS) with all my strength. They have no policy, no object, no principles. I shall not allow them to lift up their heads" [Nehru on *The Statesman*, 24 November 1961]. The Congress System itself – which allowed different political factions – such as the socialist and even the Hindu nationalist – to be represented into its folds (under its umbrella) reinforced Nehruism.

The decline of Nehru's vision of modern India was also a victim of the changes that occurred in the political panorama in India and of the failure of his economic programme. Contrary to Nehru's expectations, planned development and industrialisation did not reinforce a sense of national identity; neither did they weaken parochial loyalties initiating a secularisation of India's society. Because the ideal world described by Nehruvian ideology never materialised, and its institutions, a product of the ideology, did not work, that ideology became less credible. Similarly, Nehruvian symbolic constructions – based on the values of development, modernism, and secularism – were gradually discredited.

Nehru's failure to legitimise his brand of 'civil religion' can also be attributed to the fact that according to Bellah a civil religion "can foster integration only under the conditions of limited competition from alternative theological and ideological systems" [Bellah 1976a:155]. In modern differentiated, complex and multi-religious societies like India, a number of systems of legitimisation compete to provide the ultimate explanation and justification of the nation-state. In India it was thought that modernisation and the secularisation of the state would transfer people's loyalties from the temples to the nation and that education, state propaganda and the mass media would accelerate this process of conversion. However, the dogmas of India's civil religion were elaborated by a small educated elite. Among the masses the new dogmas, the new symbols and rituals remained overwhelmingly alien. Against this failure of the secularisation of politics, a new discourse emerged that hinged on the resurgence and revival of a religious language and that veered increasingly towards the cultural idiom of the majoritarian Hindu community.

It was under these circumstances that Indian political élites first turned towards populism as a means to maintain power (but not to challenge Nehruvian legitimate norms) and later, with the escalation of the process of delegitimation of Nehruism, they increasingly contributed to the establishment of communal idioms and to the ethnic

outlook of India's political discourse. Political leaders started to use religious arenas to make pronouncements on spirituality and national unity on behalf of the nation-state. Parties, including the ruling Congress, manoeuvred to take advantage of the situation tarnishing "what remained of its secular credentials and providing ammunition for the force of *Hindutva*" [Sherlock 1994:161], showing "little concern with political or public morality in the pursuit of what Adam Smith called 'collective goods'" [Malik and Singh 1992:321]. These manoeuvres aimed at capturing votes and ensuring electoral success by manipulating vote banks showed the effectiveness of intertwining nationalism with religious identity and that the elusive Hindu vote (that the Jana Sangh first and the BJP later had been chasing since independence) was in fact in the making [Malik and Singh 1992].

Attacks to Nehruism came from different quarters not much long after Nehru's death in 1964. Intercine conflicts within Congress for the establishment of a new leadership weakened its structure and its system thus making the party less reliable as the upholder of Nehruvian principles. War with China in 1962 was a further blow of destabilisation to Nehruism and its policy of non-alignment and non-intervention. However, when Indira Gandhi became Congress president in 1966, Nehru's emphasis on socio-economic development, secularism, industrialisation, progress still dominated the tone of the political debate. At the end of the 1960s the Congress system[55] became more fragile [Manor 1990:67]. With the 1967 election and the growth of political competition the Congress lost power in several states and for the first time oppositional parties formed coalition governments. The Congress split in 1969, and the following 1971 election were characterised by increased confrontation and inter-party competition. This new situation led Indira Gandhi to adopt a more confrontational posture towards the opposition. She also centralised decision making process within Congress, abolishing intra-party election, significantly alienating and disaffecting the

[55] For a comprehensive description of the Congress System, see Rajni Kothari [1964], W H Morris-Jones [1978] and Manor [1990]

base from the central leadership, and severing the contacts with regional and local party bosses and power bases[56].

In the 1970s Nehruvian principles were still considered fundamental norms of India's political system that could not be challenged and Indira Gandhi showed particular firmness in upholding these principles. In particular in the first years of her tenure, she insisted on prompt firm action against communalism especially against Hindu nationalism. In a series of highly symbolical manoeuvres she was exceptionally tough in denunciating Jana Sangh's brand of fascism [Jaffrelot 1996:239], and, while threatening to ban the RSS again, implemented a two-months ban of the *shakas'* activities. In addition to all that, in 1972 the government passed a Criminal Law (amendment) Bill that gave the Government new means to fight communalism and paramilitary organisations.

However, centralisation of power within the government and the Congress party itself, the transformation of the Congress structure and the decline of the Congress system eventually had serious consequences for India's political make-up. Slowly but systematically, Congress' power base was eroded which was reflected in a general decay of political institutions [Manor 1990:72] and the decline in confidence in the state as an agency of social change. In addition to that, during the 1970s the Indian people became more politicised and "increasingly aware of the logic of electoral politics, of the secrecy of the ballot, and of the notion that parties and leaders should respond to those whom they represent" [Manor 1990:72]. All this resulted in the emergence of mass politics and populism which perversely encouraged Congress to employ direct appeals to the masses in order to obtain the votes that the party was not able to obtain through its usual channels, due to the centralisation of power and end of

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[56] This process of centralisation of power in "a pyramidical decision-making structure" [Kochanek 1976:104] marked the end of intra-party democracy and seriously damaged the Congress organisation which lost contact with its power base.

intra-party democracy. This decline of India's political system was also accompanied by the emergence of new forms of nationalism heightened by the 1971 conflict with Pakistan, from which India's sense of patriotic pride was heightened [Nandy, 1980:113]. The imposition of the Emergency in 1975 and the following spell of Janata Party government were symptoms of the changed political system. The state became less assiduous in upholding India's unwritten political norms. When 1980s arrived, and Congress came back to power, the government eventually unceremoniously abandoned programmes of social and economic development [Manor 1990:85-86]. In the same period, instead of condemning the use of religion in politics, the state through the Congress and its Prime Minister used religion as an extreme measure to hang on to power.

Already in the immediate aftermath of the triumphant war with Pakistan in 1971, Indira Gandhi encouraged the cultivation of her image as Mother India, when she "found her strength in indigenous cultural terms, not by espousing modern feminism, but as a woman mobilizing the reservoir of traditional symbols of female power" [Oldenburg 1990]. Like Mother India she was pictured emerging from the map of India. She appeared in popular Indian political posters as the invincible Hindu goddess Durga, under the caption "Indira is India and India is Indira" [Oldenburg 1990]. This passage from a language of secularism and progress, to a language of religious tradition was furthermore stressed by a series of symbolic acts. Towards the end of her political career, Indira Gandhi openly flirted with the Hindu vote. During the first part of 1980s, in Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, and Punjab Indira Gandhi tried to weaken her political rivals by resorting to specifically Hindu themes and appealing to the Hindu community. In Kashmir she divided the electorate of the Hindu Jammu and Muslim valley by using a communal language. In Punjab, Indira chose Giani Zail Singh as her party's presidential candidate during the Emergency, who, when chief Minister of Punjab, used to place plaques with the sayings of Guru Nanak on Punjab's roads [Chakravarty 1994:17]. In the same period, Indira Gandhi publicly visited a large

number of temples and religious celebrations. She paid a public visit to Devraha Baba of Vrindavan. In 1983 Indira Gandhi also participated in the inauguration of Satyamitranand Giri's Bharat Mata Mandir at Hardwar and to centennial celebrations of the Arya Samaj [Jaffrelot 1996:330]. She also encouraged a "delegation led by Mr Shalwale of the Arya Samaj to launch a campaign against the conversions of a few Harijans to Islam" [Engineer 1989:9] and she was shown wearing a saffron petticoat under her sari when visiting religious sites and leaders [Manchanda 1990:34 quoted in Hocking 1994:161].

In the years that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Congress under the inexperienced leadership of her older son Rajiv tried to use the transformed political system to his advantage. But to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds meant not only that the Indian government was not above religion anymore, but also that use of religions idioms finally got legitimised. During his tenure as Prime Minister, on different occasions Rajiv Gandhi was accused of playing the communal card for electoral purposes alternatively appealing to India's two major communities, the Hindu and Muslim. The 1984 Congress electoral campaign was very aggressive. Opposition forces were depicted as antinational, breeding feelings of insecurity and of anxiety about national unity [Manor 1990:86]. The Shah Bano case, the 1986 unlocking of the gates of the Babri Masjid to allow Hindu worship, and his statement on the Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi controversy following the laying of the foundation stone of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on 9 November 1989 were all highly symbolic activities aimed at ingratiating both communities in view of the forthcoming elections and were regarded as dangerous turning points in the history of independent India [Nugent: 1990:160]. Even the immensely popular television series *Ramayana* received the blessing of Rajiv Gandhi[57].

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[57] Sagar – the director of the popular series – praised Rajiv Gandhi's role who "had always wanted a programme based on *Ramayan* to be made". [*Organiser*, 20 Nov. 1987, p.12]

All these factors contributed to the transformation of India's political panorama, the way elections were won and lost and votes obtained. Thus, the state started to speak a different language, a communalist idiom, signalling a passage from a language of development, progress and modernity, to a language of devotionalism, traditionalism and recovery of the past. While the state promoted mixed messages, fluctuating between extremes, its official symbolic repertoire became void of meanings. This created an ideological (but also symbolical) vacuum, of which the newly restructured forces of Hindu nationalism promptly took advantage.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I examined the symbolic representations of the nation and of national identity of the Nehruvian period. It was observed that because state propaganda and civic education originated from a strong centralised decision-making authority, it was able to produce consistent messages throughout its structure. This symbol-system was reproduced in a variety of media: in the publicity campaigns and newsreels issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; in the official symbolism and ceremonials of the state; in the electoral system and in the Indian National Army; and also in stamps and banknotes which announced the new political order reproducing the new national emblems, symbols and iconographical styles. The image of India that emerged was of a progressive, modern yet traditional, industrialised, multicultural and secular nation. Tractors, dams, cogwheels, electric pylons, factories, and the sheaf of wheat became the ubiquitous symbols of modern India.

The following chapters explore how, despite the resistance of the original constitutional vision of India, since the 1980s alternative visions have emerged that have promoted concepts of identity based no more on the nation but on the community (religious, regional, and linguistic). A departure from the practices of Nehruism

inevitably meant a reshaping of the political scene and changes of the values and legitimate norms of nationhood. Using Elder and Cobb's [1983] terminology, I examine how a new political system emerged which attempted to elevate lower-order symbols (mostly situational) to the status of higher-order symbols. The focus will be on Hindutva, the new dominant national narrative. The next chapters attempt to explore the role played by the Hindu religious tradition in shaping the contours of India's national identity promoting at the same time "the supreme virtues of a powerful, disciplined and disciplining nation-state, peopled by a culturally and socially unified community of spiritual Hindus" [Chakravarty and Gooptu 2000:92] and a mythical Hindu golden age. In particular, I analyse the role of pre-modern symbols, myths and traditions in the process of construction of nationhood, trying to investigate the reasons for the politicisation of the Hindu religion and the sacralisation of Indian politics.

CHAPTER 5

The Sun Will Rise and the Lotus Shall Bloom[1]

In the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in 1993 Jaswant Singh, a BJP member of the Lok Sabha, in an article published on the RSS mouthpiece *The Organiser* explicitly spoke of the emergence of a new India:

> "It is a great sorrow to me that this transition from the old order towards an emerging India [...] had to occur accompanied by violence. But it is without doubt a transition from the old to the new."[2]

Indeed, in India, during the 1980s, the erosion of the Nehruvian ideological vision of the nation created the discursive space for the renegotiation and the articulation of new concepts of nationhood and national identity [Assayag 1998:143]. In particular, the end of the preoccupations that characterised the post-colonial set-up and established the role of the nation-state, along with the emergence of a more open market economy as the "motor of modernisation and development" [Chakravarty and Gooptu 2000:91] contributed to the development of new imaginations of the nation and alternative national identities. The rise of these competitive nationalist ideologies, of which Hindutva is the most prominent one, have "raised questions about the validity of the secular nationalist ideology which has been the foundation of the Indian state since its independence [and] about the nature and function of the Indian state as well as the basis of Indian national identity." [Malik and Singh 1992:1].

The emergence of Hindu nationalism and the affirmation of its national symbolic repertoire are explored in the next two chapters. Beside assessing and examining the myths, symbols and rituals of the nation promoted by the Hindu right, these chapters also offer an analysis of the relationship between nationalism and religion in a transitional society such as India, as the chapters attempt to explain the

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[1] 1980 Vajpayee's BJP Presidential Speech; quoted in 'BJP Can Move Mountains: Advanji'. *BJP Today*, 16-31 January 2006, vol. 15 (2).

[2] Jaswant Singh. *Organiser*, 11. Apr. 1993. Quoted in Jaffrelot [1996:475].

role of religion in the processes of evolution of Indian national identity at the end of the twentieth century. The critical exchange here is with Brass and Smith's works in relation to the role of religion in ethno-national identifications in the modern world, and the role of religious symbols in making ethnicity a meaningful cultural and political category.

This chapter is divided in two parts. In the first part, I will provide a brief historical account of Hindu nationalism, presenting also an assessment of its electoral performance. The second part is instead devoted to the analysis of Hindutva's strategies for nation-building. An examination of Hindutva's symbolic repertoire is instead the focus of the following chapter. We can anticipate here that Hindutva's symbolic repertoire is made up of symbols of consensus and differentiation in that these symbols "index different social identifications and summarize different patterns of tastes, moralities, and general life-styles" [Elder and Cobb 1983:122 quoting Gusfield 1963:172] thus distinguishing among different categories of citizens.

While the symbolic inventory of Nehruvian India was made up of symbols of the regime and the political community, Hindutva's symbols are for the major part situational symbols. This particular feature typical of Hindutva's symbolic repertoire is extremely significant and points to a very interesting fact. Rather than completely replacing higher-order symbols of the regime and the political community (a particularly difficult task that only radical political movements such as revolutions have proved capable of doing), Hindutva has adopted a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, it has appropriated higher-order symbols by attaching new meanings to them. On the other, it has aimed at transforming situational lower-order symbols into higher-order ones. Thus, by building the legitimacy of Hindutva's political symbol and heightening its symbolic weight first rather than imposing a new symbolic order, Hindutva hoped to eventually change the stockpile of India's basic nationalist symbolic repertoire without directly attacking the pre-existing symbolic order.

The Rise of the Hindu right. Hindutva Ideology and the BJP electoral Performance

Hindu nationalism has always been an important component of India's freedom movement and a considerable force in Indian politics playing a crucial role also in the life of the Congress. Articulated at the beginning of the twentieth century and rooted both in the history of the Indian national movement itself and in the socio-religious reform and revivalist movements of the late nineteenth century, it was born as a reaction to the impact of modern western thought which was ushered in by colonial rule. The influence of European thought and ideologies of nationalism instilled a sense of insecurity and inadequacy amongst certain westernised Hindu elites who were pushed to reform or revive their traditions in order to gain self-respect, to defend their identity and to meet the challenges posed by the West. Indeed, the meeting with other cultures triggered a process of conscious ideologisation of cultural practices. In its most elementary form, Hindu nationalism propounded a form of ethnic nationalism, which identified the essence of the emerging Indian national identity in India's spirituality and in the Hindus its "recognisable cultural unit" [Jaffrelot 1996:12 quoting Smith 1971:217] of India. A form of primordial nationalism and the concept of Aryanism permeated early Hindu nationalist thought [Bhatt 2001]. According to this frame of thought, the Indian state, its social formation and civil society should be reorganized entirely along Hindu principles and doctrine. Despite this, Hindu nationalism was not a homogeneous movement and included both those who wanted to preserve Hindu traditional social order and those who wanted to reform Hindu tradition to strengthen India's national unity. Both however, aimed at recovering a Hindu national identity by going back to the fundamental truths of Hinduism. Inevitably, the political character of Hindu nationalism was couched in religious terms.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) were some of the major exponents of this doctrine. However, fundamental to the political ideology of contemporary Hindu nationalism was Veer Savarkar's *Essentials of Hindutva! Who is a Hindu?* which made the term Hindutva the foundational concept of modern Hindu nationalist ideology and

provided an elaborate and, for the first time, distinct definition of Indianness [Bhatt 2001]. Savarkar's definition of Indianness was inspired by western nationalist thought which identified in the unity of land, people and culture (the latter understood either as language, religion, customs and traditions) the basic essence of every nation. Indeed, for Savarkar the definition of Hindutva, or Hindunness, is not necessarily based on religion, but on territory, blood and even culture: *rashtra, jati* and *samskriti.* Even if the three elements identified as constituent of Indian identity are equally important and essential, it is *samskriti* – which Savarkar intended as culture and civilization – that was crucial for the definition of Indianness. In Savarkar's terms, culture and civilization are strictly linked to religion and they include the "common laws and rites" [1969:92]. Thus, central to this brand of cultural nationalism is the idea that India is not a composite culture born out of the intermingling of different cultural traditions. On the contrary, according to Hindutva's ideologue, India is basically Hindu. A series of foreign invasions gave the impression that India possessed a composite culture, when in reality, the argument goes, all other cultures 'hinduized' themselves when they came in contact with Hinduism [Basu et al. 1993: 37]. In Savarkar's own words, a Hindu "means person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from the Indus to the seas as his Fatherland, as well as his Holy land – that is the cradle land of his religion". Thus, Hinduism became "the pillar of a nativized version of nationalism build in opposition to the liberal secular model" [Nandy 1995:57].

Hindu nationalism was also based on the reform of Hinduism which was thus transformed into a homogeneous pan-Indian religion by downplaying caste and sect differences, identifying a common ritual practice and a common holy book. Because the aspects – as well as the histories and myths – which were generally created or selected to ascertain certain aspects of the national life mirrored the aspiration of the dominant elites, this reformed Hinduism incorporated mainly Brahminic and Vedic traditions while rejecting Hinduism's small traditions [3]. Besides homogenising

[3] A series of factors determined this predilection for high culture. First, the early stalwarts of Hindutva were naturally culturally alienated from India's forms of vernacular Hinduism. Second, the re-discovery of classical Hinduism by European sympathetic scholars and their reconstruction of Hinduism influenced the Indian reformers. Lastly, under the influence of

traditions of Hinduism, Hindu nationalism pushed to "masculinize and martialize" [Nandy 1995:60] the Hindu community, which they considered heavily feminised and weakened by the Orientalist discourse. In Hindu nationalism there is indeed a likeness to "the romanticist vision of recuperation of past glory and latent spirituality of India through employment of modern techniques of scholarship, modern organization, discipline and collective will in order to overcome the humiliation inflicted by colonial rule" [Hansen 1999:43]. History – as the collective memory of the nation – became the central pillar in the process of building a cultural identity, the fundamental tool for legitimising India's present actions. This prompted a selection of the past, and a search for local heroes and patriotic figures who symbolically resisted foreign power (like the eighteenth century Maharatta ruler Shivaji who fought against the Muslims rulers), focusing on the histories of those that the British identified as India's martial castes (the Rajputs and Maratthas) and transforming the history of India into a perpetual struggle against foreign (in particular Muslim) invaders.

Disillusioned by Congress politics and deeply influenced by Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS] in 1925. It was the collapse of the nationalist cooperation movement and of Hindu-Muslim joint political action, accompanied by the emergence of the anti-caste movement (which was probably perceived as a threat to the emergence of a unified Hindu nation) that prompted Hedgewar to find an alternative nationalist model to the one proposed by the Congress. Adopting the essence of Savarkar's Hindutva as its ideological plank, the RSS was born with the aim of building a Hindu nation to safeguard Hindu *dharma* and its culture. Despite pledging to work for the liberation of the Hindu nation, at the beginning, the RSS focused on recruiting and training young boys to serve the cause of Hindu nationalism and the Hindu nation, rather than searching for direct involvement in politics. The RSS was conceived as an authoritarian, highly centralised, hierarchical and paramilitary organisation. Great importance was given to character-building of its members (*swayamsevak*) through the inculcation of discipline, and the ideal of service for the

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evangelical Christianity, India's little traditions were systematically devalued and became indices of India's backwardness.

Hindu nation. The call for discipline and physical training derived from the belief that the Hindus, after a prosperous golden age, had become complacent and divided and easy prey for successive Muslim invasions and British domination. Thus, in order to build a strong Hindu nation, according to Golwalkar, another Maharashtrian Brahmin who succeeded Hedgewar at the helm of the RSS:

> "[T]here is only one remedy. To reawaken in ourselves (...) our own national consciousness penetrating deep into the soil. (...) It is only (...) an organisation of the type of the [RSS], capable of embracing all of our people in a loving and eternal brotherhood and making them intensely conscious of their national destiny that can effectively check the present rot of selfishness, dissensions, and vulgar imitations"[Golwalkar 1966:228].

Idolised as 'Guruji', Golwalkar is considered another important figure in the development of Hindutva ideology. Like Savarkar's, his social and political philosophy was dominated by the question of national identity. According to Golwalkar, Indian identity is exclusively Hindu. It was Hinduism that shaped the nation and resisted the assault of heterogeneous cultural systems. Because diversity challenged this rigid definition of Indianness, Hindutva was naturally less tolerant than other ideologies towards minorities, which are seen "a sign of backwardness or of national betrayal" [Nandy 1995:80]. Golwalkar, strongly rejected multiculturalism and in a famous passage, stated that:

> "[T]he foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture [...] or may stay in the country,wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen's rights" [Golwalkar 1939:62][4].

Taking as a model Germany under Nazism, Golwalkar provided a definition of the Hindu nation as basically opposite to the idea of composite nationalism. Golwalkar offered a very exclusivist definition of Indianness. In this sense, Hindu, which for Savarkar did not necessarily refer to a specific religious identity, with Golwalkar is identified with Hinduism. Indeed, for Golwalkar nationhood was based on the unity of country, race, religion, culture and language.

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[4] Note though, that both Savarkar and Golwalkar were more interested in cultural uniformity rather than racial homogeneity.

The RSS gained significant popularity during Partition when its members did considerable relief work with and for the Hindu refugees. In the aftermath of its ban following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, the RSS realised that, being primarily a cultural and social organisation, it needed to be able to influence politics. Refusing to convert into a political party, in 1951 the RSS founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh [BJS], a political party sympathetic to its ideology. Cultural nationalism and 'integral humanism' were the central ideological planks of the Jana Sangh. Integral humanism was defined by Deendayal Upadhyaya, an RSS member and founder of the Jana Sangh. Liberally using a large number of traditional Hindu tropes, Upadhyaya identified the ideal social order in an organic Indian unity based on *ektamata* (oneness) and regulated by *dharma* (duty) understood as "those eternal principles that sustain an entity – individual or corporate – and abiding by which, that entity can achieve material prosperity in this world and spiritual salvation in the next" [quoted in Malik and Singh 1994:17]. Integral humanism was also the base for the formulation of an alternative model of economic development respectful of indigenous ethos and culture[5].

After founding the Jana Sangh, the RSS sought to expand its base by creating in 1964 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP] with the intent to unite the various Hindu religious leaderships and sects. Through the promotion of a programme of socio-cultural reforms and ethno-religious mobilising campaigns, the VHP has since become an effective agent of Hindutva's strategy. The VHP's activity mainly aims at the uplifting of a religious consciousness through vast scale programs of ritual performances and dissemination of teachings about Hinduism. Other organisations – of which the trade unions [Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh – BMS], the strong North Indian student movement [Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad – ABVP] and the youth wing of the VHP [Bajrang Dal] are the most prominent – have since joined what has become to be known as the Sangh Parivar (literally, the family of organisations).

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[5] On the electoral politics of the BJS see later.

In this national narrative, it is this supposed primacy of Hindu culture that is promoted to counter successfully the perceived threat from Western culture, while the invention of a mythical past of unity, harmony and prosperity helps creating the idea of homogeneous genuine community. Hindutva's vision for India is deliberately defined against Nehru's own version. The nation is based on a supposed common ethnicity and consists of a common language, culture and sometimes race. Citizenship and participation to the nation are not defined by the Constitution but by cultural parameters and ethnic loyalties. If Nehru's model of nationhood guaranteed pluralism, Hindutva's denies it or subsumes it under the majoritarian *tolerant*[6] Hindu identity. While Nehru's Indianness was a reflection of an all-inclusive territorial nationalism and found expression in the Constitution and in the 1955 Citizen Act, Hindutva's ideal of a Hindu nation is exclusivist. If according to the Constitution an Indian is anyone who is born within the country's borders, for the Sangh Parivar a true Indian is he/she who regards India not only as his/her fatherland but also as his/her holy land. Rejecting the universalistic and territorial quality of nationalism, Savarkar specified the ethnic and racial character of the Hindutva brand of nationalism although rejecting the concept of racial purity:

> "The Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of the love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood. They are not only a nation but a rece-jati. The word jati, derived from the root Jan, to produce, means a brotherhood, a race determined by a common origin, possessing a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the might race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers." [Savarkar1969:84-85]

However, Hindutva and the political culture with it associated does not simply reject Nehruvian values and symbols. On the contrary, it re-appropriated some of the higher-order symbols of Nehruvian India to suit the Sangh Parivar's ideology. Pandey [1993:265] regards the "ability of Hindu discourse to appropriate for itself the language of the 'truly' national" a factor that ultimately works in favour of Hindutva. Even though during the 1980s following the demise of Nehruvian symbolism, the Sangh Parivar brought on the political arena a great novelty, vehemently resuscitating a

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[6] On Hindutva's notion of tolerance see below.

symbolic tradition, the Sangh Parivar's ideology is not obscurantist or revolutionary. Indeed, Hindu nationalism albeit revivalist in nature, and opposed to civic nationalism is not straightforwardly anti-democratic and does not purport the establishment of an authoritarian state[7]. Hindu nationalism and secular nationalism both aspire to make India a modern nation within a democratic framework. The Sangh Parivar Hindu nationalist ideology is still based on values of democracy, liberalism and modernism. It is the model of nationhood that they propose and the concept of what constitutes identity that they differ with the Nehruvian model:

> "Their challenge does not involve a dismissal of 'secularism', and an advocacy of a 'communal' form of nationalism. Rather it involves a struggle over the very terms themselves. Post-independence Congress governments are labelled 'pseudo-secular', and accused of pandering to the 'minorities'. Such 'minorityism', it is argued, undermines 'true' secularism and is in effect communal" [Hocking 1994:162].

Indeed, India might be in danger of communalising its cultural outlook, but not of losing its democracy in favour of an autocratic regime. For Hocking [1994:162-163] Hindutva is essentially anti-Congress, "a critique of the Congress version of secular nationalism". Indeed, despite invoking different sets of values in their definition of national identities, both Nehruvian nationalism and Hindutva employ a "'concept of the state that was a minor variation of the post seventeenth century European concept of Nation state'. Both groups utilize the same higher-order symbols and slogans to create a sense of cohesion among different groups and seek to mobilise people belonging to different communities for political purposes". [Malik and Singh 1992:21 quoting Nandy 1989].

Concepts of secularism, nationalism, patriotism and of national integration, development and modernisation are still the symbolic pillars of India. But it is their contents that vary significantly and their role in the definition of nationalism and of national identity, whose essential meanings depart drastically from the previous ones.

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[7] This has not always been so. According to Chandra the Jana Sangh had repeatedly shown its ill-disguised opposition to democracy for it could not implement its communal agenda without "strengthening the reactionary, exploitative elements of the economy" ['Jan Sangh: the BJP's Predecessor'. Chandra, Bipan. *The Hindu* 11 May 1998].

Those higher-order symbols of the political community and the regime that characterised Nehru's vision of independent India are still standing. For instance, the Sangh Parivar attacks not the idea of secularism *per se* but the version of it propagated by the Congress. They labelled it pseudo-secularism, accusing Congress leaders and generally the left, of pandering to the minorities (or the *non-Hindu-Indians*) accusing them of having thus embraced a Western-type of nationalism. Suggesting that Nehruvian secularism is trite and has no roots in the Indian soil, Hindutva aims at replacing the Western concept of secularism with an indigenously developed brand of secularism which is rooted in Hindu traditions. The logic behind this argument is simple. It holds that Hinduism is by nature flexible and tolerant and that on the base of this it is possible to build a secular polity without dissociating the state from Hinduism, India's dominant culture. India is a deep religious land, therefore the state cannot keep away from religious matters and should actively promote religious life. The argument goes that Hinduism being the majority religion in the subcontinent, the state should support and favour Hinduism over other religious creeds. It is in this light that Nehruvism is accused of misunderstanding the real nature of India in denying its deep religiosity both in a cultural and practical sense.

The concept of tolerance in Hindutva's discourse is based on the unique Hindu philosophical notion of *sarva dharma sama bhava* (equal respect for all religions). However, as Tanika Sarkar perceptively notes, this "very pluralism and tolerance (...) is taken to characterize a single national ethos which is essentially Hindu, and to which all immigrant religions into India have adapted themselves."[1993:33]. Indeed, in Hindutva's discourse "Hindu tolerance is always counterposed against supposed Muslim intolerance and fanaticism." [Basu et al 1993: 4]. The Sangh Parivar would like to assert that the Hindu nation they put forth will be "a safe repose for all creeds and sects" [ibid] as opposed to the current secular state in which – they would argue – Hindus are treated as second class citizens as evidenced by instances such as the Babri Masjid mosque which the government allowed to exist upon the birthplace of Ram for an extended period. According to Basu et al. [1993] to ensure tolerance of all throughout the state, Hindutva forces argue that "toleration, to be secure, must then stamp out all that is not Hindu [i.e. Muslim], for what is not Hindu is always

intolerant."[Basu et Al.75] Thus, while notionally ascribing the principle of secularism as a fundamental value of independent India, the Sangh Parivar promotes a strictly Hindutva-flavored version of tolerance. Indeed, according to Embree [1990] what is usually mistaken for Hindu tolerance is in fact a process of 'encapsulation' of external religious traditions into the folds of Hindu thought. By taking into consideration the fact that Indian thought is characterized by a belief that there are many different levels of truth to many different people, Embree goes on to conclude that it is this characteristic of Hindu religious thought that is often confused with Hindu religious tolerance. Embree then argues that "all truths, all social practices, can be encapsulated with the society as long as there is willingness to accept the premise on which the encapsulation is based" [1990:30].

The aim of the Sangh Parivar is not simply to obtain political power but also to transform society. This programme of social engineering recalls the one launched by Nehru. However, unlike Nerhu's programme, the Sangh Parivar's is a programme of cultural awakening (*jagaran*) of India's Hindu sentiments and of nationalisation of all non-Hindus "by inculcating in them the ideal of Bharatiya culture"[8]. Obviously this is also an eminently political programme, because the goal is the eventual creation of a homogeneous Hindu nation. Because its ambition is to reform society and "to penetrate the whole of society through its network of *shakhas*", Hindutva has taken on "the form of a long-term project" [Jaffrelot 1996:77]. The success of the Hindu nationalist movement has depended on a combination of several factors, four of which are worth of mention here. The first two of these factors are external and depend on the socio-political and economic context, while the other two are direct a result of the Sangh Parivar's strategy to secure access to political power. First, the political context has so far played a decisive role in creating favourable conditions for the expansion of the movement. It was the state's faltering in its commitment towards Nehruvian principles and normative rules and the decline of the Congress party that were critical to the Sangh Parivar's ideological and political success. Indeed, according to Jaffrelot:

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[8] Shyama Prasad Mookerjee quoted in 'Jan Sangh: the BJP's Predecessor'. Chandra, Bipan. *The Hindu* 11 May 1998.

> "[T]he communalisation of politics tended therefore to remove the restraints which the government's promotion of secularism – combined with threats of repression – had hitherto imposed on the Hindu nationalists' instrumentalist strategy" [Jaffrelot 1996:336].

Secondly, the slow but constant liberalisation of the economy of 1990s had been responsible for the rise of an expanding middle-class disenchanted with the old political system and eager to embrace a more exclusivist nationalist ideology. Third, grassroots penetration, thanks to the unflagging work of the RSS accompanied by a strategy of mobilisation along ethno-religious lines carried out by the VHP, increased the popularity of the movement. And finally, a series of tactic alliances with several regional and national parties has been a contributing factor to the electoral success of the political spearhead of the movement.

Indeed, the movement has always oscillated between a strategy of integration – and therefore dilution of its most strident Hindu nationalist ideology – and one of aggressive ethno-mobilisation. Hocking argues that because Hindutva created a space in which

> "the key concepts of Indian nationalist discourse [...] are available for reinterpretation and articulation" there remains "a good deal of scope [...] to shape their political message according to the specific contingencies of a situation" [Hocking 1994:163].

The end of the 1960s saw for instance the dominance of the strategy of ethno-religious mobilisation (epitomised by the cow protection movement of those years), while in the following decade the Sangh Parivar opted for a strategy of amalgamation by allowing its political spearhead, the Jana Sangh, to be integrated with the Janata Party movement and to participate in the Janata Party government[9] that won the 1977 elections held at the end of the Emergency. Since then the Sangh Parivar has returned to a strategy of ethno-religious mobilisation and the movement has grown stronger: the VHP and RSS networks have grown larger and the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] – born from the ashes of the defunct Janata Party in 1980 – has now become India's strongest

[9] The Janata Party coalition, which formed the first non-Congress government of independent India, included the Congress (O), the Socialist Party, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Congress for Democracy and the Jana Sangh.

and largest party which has governed for a considerable time both at the centre and in several states in coalition with other national or regional parties. At the end of the previous chapter, I examined the political context that was instrumental to the Sangh Parivar's growth. Here, in the next part of the chapter, I first provide a brief overview of the Jana Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party electoral performance, followed by a consideration of the Sangh Parivar strategies of ethno-religious mobilisation.

Electoral Success

One of the comments that were usually made about the BJP in the late 1990s was that it had experienced an exponential growth of its parliamentary seats and its vote share. Although these observations were true, Hindu Nationalist parties have always been important components of India's electoral system. After independence, Hindu nationalism – till then a vibrant component of the nationalist movement – almost disappeared from the Indian political spectrum. Partition, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Naturam Godse – a member of the a Hindu Mahasabha – which was followed by the banning of communalist organisations and of the RSS, accompanied by the State's strong commitment to secularism, pushed the movement to a position of political untouchability. But, when by the late 1960s-early 1970s the Indian political elites faltered in their commitment to Nehruvian normative rules, Hindutva forces emerged in opposition to the Congress system. It was in the fluctuating ideological context of those years that Hindu nationalism rose again to prominence. From an electoral point of view, the political front of the Sangh Parivar experienced mixed results at the national level. Before it amalgamated into the Janata Party in 1977, the Jana Sangh had sustained a slow but consistent growth. After independence, it passed from a mere 3 seats in the Lok Sabha (corresponding to 3.1% of votes) in 1952 to a maximum of 35 seats (9.4%) in 1967. In the following elections (1971) the party reduced its vote share, obtaining only 7.4% of the votes and 22 seats in parliament. It was during the Janata Party experiment that the Jana Sangh vote share dramatically increased becoming – with 93 parliamentary seats – the largest component in the Janata alliance. Significantly, three Jana Sangh members became part of Moraji Desai's

government[10]. In the following assembly elections held in June 1977, the party ruled three states (Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan) and one union territory (Delhi) while several other members of the Jana Sangh were part of the government of other states were the Janata Party won majorities.

During the Janata experiment not just the party, but the whole Sangh Parivar grew considerably. The RSS reported a significant surge in membership. The number of *shakhas* grew from 8,500 in 1975 to 17,000 in 1981, thanks mostly to the RSS rapid expansion in the four southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Other RSS affiliates experienced similar growth. The BMS passed from 1.2 million members in 1977 to 1.8 million in 1980 becoming the second largest national trade union, second only to the Indian Trade Union Congress. Its student affiliate, the ABVP saw its membership increasing from 170,000 in 1977 to 250,000 in 1982 strengthening its position as the strongest national student union. [Anderson and Damle, 1987:215]. However, when in 1980 after the dissolution of the Janata Party the ex-Jana Sanghis founded the Bharatiya Janata Party, the party obtained only two seats in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections with a dismal 7.4% of votes. But at the 1989 parliamentary elections, the BJP passed from a mere two seats in the Lok Sabha to 86 with a 11.5% of votes polled, and in 1991 continued to grow winning 120 parliamentary seats and enjoying a whopping 20% of the vote-share. Since then the party had become particularly powerful in the traditional Hindu nationalist stronghold (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi) which on their own contributed to roughly four-fifths of all parliamentary seats won. The party continued to grow in the following parliamentary elections passing from 160 parliamentary seats in 1996, to 180 in 1998, 182 in 1999[11]. At the state level the picture is obviously more complex. Both the Jana Sangh and the BJP have been mainly successful in the northern Hindi-speaking states, especially Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and the union territory of Delhi. But party performance during the years shows that even there its

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[10] Atal Behari Vajpayee was Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lal Krishan Advani was Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Brij Lal Varma was Minister of Industry.

[11] In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections the BJP obtained only 138 parliamentary seats and its vote share dropped from 23.75% (1999) to 21.48% (2004). Its National Democratic Alliance [NDA] coalition was defeated by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance [UPA].

power base has recently shifted considerably mostly due to the emergence of strong regional or caste-based parties. The BJP has ruled alone or in coalition a number of states (Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, the union territory of Delhi) and from 1999 to 2004 it also ruled the country at the helm of the 24-party strong National Democratic Alliance [NDA] coalition government, when Sangh Parivar key MPs occupied crucial ministries such as the Education and the Information and Broadcasting Ministries. Besides having become the largest all-India party, the crucial thing about the BJP electoral success is that its access to political power has guaranteed the Hindu nationalists access to national and state institutions.

Whereas in this section I have discussed the electoral performance of the Sangh Parivar's political vanguard, in the following section I examine the Sangh Parivar's strategy of nation-building and their use of symbols and symbolic activities. The Sangh Parivar's symbolic repertoire will be the topic of the following chapter.

The Sangh Parivar's Strategies of Nation Building

The long-term goal of the Sangh Parivar is to make India Hindu, to create an Indian identity which will privilege the Hindu cultural tradition, rather than appealing to civic values of Nehruvian nationalism. Thus, while under Nehruvism India's national identity was deprived of cultural markers (the Indian population was imagined homogeneous as a class of patriotic producers [Deshpande 2000:185], but culturally, religiously, linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous – "a conglomeration of people who represented difference" [Nag, 2001:4760]) under the influence of the Sangh Parivar's dominant cultural politics and political ideology, which resulted in the conversion of religious identity into a political identity, the new Indian identity is strongly culturally defined. This is an endless source of preoccupation for India's secularists and numerous religious, regional and linguistic minorities.

The Sangh Parivar – either through its political outfits or its cultural affiliates – has implemented a strategy of transformation of India's national identity through the manipulation of its symbolic order. Consonant with the Sangh Parivar's ideology of Hindu nationalism, this transformation is mainly implemented through the

appropriation of Hindu cultural practices. Traditions – created, invented or rediscovered – are all part of the process of nation building [Malik and Singh 1994:216]. Indeed, symbols, myths and rituals help to consolidate collective identities. In particular Hindutva's forces use those symbols, practices and discursive formations that are reminiscent or derived from pre-existing cultural forms or traditions. The use of historically older narratives, symbols and practices is not a neutral practice but it obviously involves a process of selection, re-interpretation and appropriation. Thus, the Sangh Parivar's symbolic repertoire – although derived from the Hindu cultural traditions – is nevertheless novel in its composition and character. Significant manifestations of these symbolical appropriations and continuities can be seen for instance in the Sangh Parivar's organisational structure itself, where often relations among its different members recall the traditional typical *guru-sishya* relationship. As it will be shown, its visual language and strategies of mobilisation also replicate Hindu cultural traditions.

However, some of the practices and symbols are also invented or re-interpreted with an evident appeal to what Jaffrelot [1996:338] calls "nationalist devotionalism". The Sangh Parivar developed a strategy that saw to combine the basic values of the Indian nation with other sets of values this time drawn from the religious repertoire, thus attaching fresh ideological meaning to those higher-order symbols [Elder and Cobb 1983] of Nehruvian India such as *swadeshi*, Gandhism, secularism, modernity, patriotism and nationalism. It is by employing symbols endowed with a high emotive content – "effective triggers of associated sentiments" [Elder and Cobb 1983:39] – that the Sangh Parivar has aimed at capturing the imagination of the Indian electorate.

Thus, the Sangh Parivar's symbolic repertoire becomes very compelling, being a reinterpretation of India's traditional ways of representation and of communication. The use of a political idiom steeped in the religious tradition of Hinduism has brought to the fore a language that lay dormant and at the periphery of the official political idiom during the Nehruvian years. I shall return to Hindutva's symbolism in details in the following chapter. Here I briefly introduce it to provide a better understanding to the Sangh Parivar's nation-building techniques. Hindutva's symbolic repertoire is

quintessentially Hindu. The Sangh Parivar's symbolic repertoire differs significantly from Nehru's idiom based on scientific objectivity and rationality that was populated by visual and verbal images of progress, industrial development and national achievements. Because Hindutva was born as a reaction against the instabilities produced by modernisation, it obviously does not look towards the future for inspiration in the same way that Nehruvism did. On the contrary, at the core of the Sangh Parivar's language there is an overwhelming archaism characterised by a circular view of history and rebirths and by the concept of a lost golden age. While Nehruvism was projected towards the future and rested firmly on modernism with its powerful images of progress, Hindutva imagery and symbolism – inspired by a nostalgic allegory of a golden age – dwells on the past. Their symbolic constructions make use of archetypal images and iconographic styles, in an attempt to create continuity with this "chosen" golden past. It is a rejection of realism as an expression of the present and of rationalism, in favour of emotion. Through this device, Hindutva symbolism seeks to evoke eternal values and truths.

The symbols of family and the community have become metonymic of the nation, while farmers and workers, once the mainstay of Nehru's vision for India, have been pushed into the background. Instead, martyrs, saints, gurus, gods and goddesses take the place of the Nehruvian common men and women. Bharata Mata, Gau Mata, Ganga Mata, Ram and Sita, Hanuman, Shivaji and the Sangh Parivar's gurus – Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar – are the new protagonists of the Hindutva's symbolic repertoire. Most recently, the Sangh Parivar – by combining a military and religious imagery – has made use of the symbolism of martyrdom and personal sacrifice through the projection of the martyrs of Ayodhya and of Kargil who have since become the new Indian common men. In contrast to Nehruvism, the common men that populate Sangh Parivar's pantheon are not representations of the perfect citizen. On the contrary, they are the personification of a religious ideal and of the perfect 'believer'. Significantly, the unity of people is represented differently in the two ideologies. For Nehru – according to whom national cooperation were essential prerequisites for the development of India – unity was expressed by showing images of the people working together either in a factory, in the fields, in laboratories, in

universities and at schools or by portraying the crowds at mass events such as Republic Day Parade [see for instance fig. 11 in Chapter 4]. For the Sangh Parivar – which understands the concept of unity as signifying a homogeneous Hindu block – unity is expressed either by recurrent appeals to India's sacred geography through the display of the ubiquitous map of undivided India or by images of mass *worship* – like those portraying the *kar sewaks* at Ayodhya, or the crowds participating to the Sangh Parivar's *yatras* and other processual [Assayag 1998] ritual activities.

In its bid to redefine the paradigms of India's national imagination and replacing the ideological foundation of India's Nehruvian nationalism with Hindutva, the Sangh Parivar has created a very compelling symbolic language that makes use of familiar concepts that are also represented in familiar iconographic modes. This symbolic inventory is implemented through the application of a three-pronged strategy. First – as I have already mentioned – the Sangh Parivar appropriates higher-order symbols of the political community and the regime, while elevating situational, lower-order symbols to higher-order status. Secondly, Hindutva forces significantly over-write existing traditional ceremonies and symbols with fresh meanings. And lastly, their *modus operandi* point to a process of transference whereby partisan symbols are transformed into national ones. Since Hindutva forces have gained access to power either in the states or at the national level, there has been the inevitable blurring of the spheres of action of the Sangh Parivar with that one of the Indian state, building a link between the political and the religious sphere, the state and the community. The Sangh Parivar has always employed ethno-religious symbols and processual ritual actions even before gaining political power. Nonetheless, those symbols and rituals that before were clearly branded as belonging to a specific Hindu nationalist organisation (be it the RSS or the VHP), have recently acquired a new legitimacy being performed and wielded under the aegis of the nation-state. This is particularly relevant to some public ceremonies that will be examined in the next chapter. Because the boundaries separating the public ceremonies promoted and staged by the state and those ones sponsored by the Sangh Parivar are more and more fuzzy, mass celebrations that in the past would have been clearly written off as Hindutva have now become less distinguishable from other national official ceremonies. This was particularly evident

during the 2002 Gujarat state elections. In the same period two apparently independent processual actions took place: the Chief Minister Modi's *Gaurav Yatra* (Days of Pride) and the Hindu *Pad Padshahi*. These rituals were organised respectively by the BJP and the VHP. The promotion of Modi's official state *yatra* became entangled with the *Pad Padshahi*, the VHP's mass contact programme for Hindu awakening. Indeed, the VHP's Hindu *Pad Padshahi* was explicitly set up to reach those areas not covered by Modi's *Gaurav Yatra*. The *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* – which will be discussed in the following chapter – is another remarkable example of the Sangh Parivar's modus operandi.

This three-pronged strategy of appropriation of higher-order symbols, over-writing of established ceremonies, and of transference is implemented through three important practices: the establishment of a calendar of official celebration, the introduction of an ever-expanding number of newly invented rituals and the imposition of an alternative pantheon of national icons.

Days to Remember: the Sangh Parivar's Ritual calendar

In the previous chapter I discussed how state ceremonies and rituals allow the performance of national identity. On that occasion I argued how, India's post-colonial government established an official calendar of national celebrations to promote a feeling of solidarity and heighten a sense of belonging and national identification. The official national calendar included Hindu, Christian and Muslim religious festivals. However, while paying homage to India's major religious traditions, it was the secular national holidays (in particular Independence Day and Republic Day) that became the privileged sites for the celebration of the Indian nation. If national rituals are important symbolic activities for the affirmation of nationalist ideology and the promotion of a sense of belonging, it is not surprising then that often, when a new regime replaces an old one, the establishment of innovative national ceremonies becomes crucial for the redefinition of the political space. As it was suggested in the previous pages, rather than substituting India's official calendar of national celebrations, the Sangh Parivar has instituted a new "calendar of rearranged festivals" [Assayag 1998:142], carving out a ceremonial space at the fringes of official state activity. These ritual occasions do not intend to be directly antagonistic to the state's ceremonial calendar. Indeed, ceremonies

are held on different days and tend to celebrate different anniversaries, peoples and ideals.

The Sangh Parivar insists on having every event by them organised to coincide with relevant and important dates. Commemoration of anniversaries is obviously a vehicle for the leadership to communicate with the masses. According to Kertzer anniversaries and special dates are symbolic markers that provide "a ritual rationale for development and communication of the myths that compose the party's version of history" [Kertzer 1996:19]. The symbolic linkage of any Sangh Parivar's event to events happened in the past is meant not only to promote "a certain view of the past" but also to legitimise Hindutva and "its actions and leadership in the present" [Kertzer 1996:20]. The infamous large scale processions, organised by the VHP since 1980s, aimed at just that: namely at creating alternative occasions to celebrate the nation and the people of India according to Hindutva's nationalist ideology. Indeed, inasmuch as the new rituals are expression of Hindutva ideology, they can be seen as antagonistic to the state. It is the image of nation and the concept and model of nationhood that they propound that is fundamentally different from the Nehruvian model, which still inspires – at least formally – India's national calendar.

Thus, a host of special one-off celebrations have been regularly and gradually introduced across India. May 11, the anniversary of the nuclear explosions at Pokhran of 1998, has been since celebrated as National Technology Day and – significantly – as Resurgent Indian Day. December 6 – anniversary of the destruction of the mosque of Ayodhya – has been observed as Shaurya Divas (Days of Valour) since 1993[12]. From 2003, February 11 was to be celebrated every year all over India as the *Samarpan Diwas* to commemorate the death anniversary of Deendayal Upadhaya[13]. Significantly, on other occasions, the Sangh Parivar has held public ceremonies on dates already set aside for the celebration of other ceremonies – religious or otherwise. This practice of

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[12] Shaurya Divas is celebrated yearly. On the same day the Babri Masjid Action Committee celebrates the same events as Kalank Divas, Days of Shame. [See *Frontline* 5-18 December 1998 for the 1998 event.]

[13] *BJP Today*. 1-15 March 2003. Vol. 12, No. 05.

staging public ceremonies on days that are associated with other festivities not only legitimises the new holiday, but it also increases its emotional appeal and its mobilisation potential. Often Sangh Parivar's public ceremonies are celebrated (or commence or finish) on particular days which also commemorate the Sangh Parivar's father figures or significant events of the Sangh Parivar's history. Thus, 18 March 1999 was celebrated as Ugadi (Tamil New Year), the beginning of the Hindu new century of the Kaliyuga and as Hedgewar's birthday.

Significantly, the celebration of Hedgewar's birthday is also part of the official ceremonial annual calendar of the RSS. The ceremony of *Varsh Pratipad* – that is celebrated in the spring to commemorate the time when Yudhishtira and Vikramaditya started the old calendar year and Rama was crowned king – is one of the RSS major rituals and coincides with Hedgewar's birthday being sometimes observed as Founder's Day. The RSS' rich festive calendar includes five other important festivals that are regularly observed throughout India. *Hindu Samrajya Divotsav* is usually observed in May to celebrate Shivaji's coronation and his victory over the Mughals. *Rakshabandhan* – a popular North Indian ritual of brotherly friendship – is also celebrated by the RSS to remind *swayamsevaks* of their duty to sacrifice their lives. Another important festivals is *Guru Dakshina* when the RSS saffron flag (*bhagwa dhwaj*) – which is also revered as the *guru* – is worshipped and donations taken. This festival is followed by *Dasara*, one of the India's most popular Hindu's festivals that marks the victory of Ram over Ravana. In the RSS version however, weapons (associated with Shivaji) are worshipped, *shakas* take out processions and *swayamsevaks* demonstrate their martial skills. It is *Makar sankranti* that closes the RSS ritual year. Celebrating the winter solstice, it is observed to foster those traits that are considered crucial for the RSS: personal sacrifice and service to the nation [Andersen and Damle: 1987:92-93]. For the RSS these festivals are meant to shape the spirit of the group. While a part of the RSS festivals coincides with already established and well-attended Hindu rituals (like *Rakshabandhan* and *Dasera*), the rest of the festivals introduced by the RSS were created ex-novo. However, even if the festivals might seem at a first sight distinct from ordinary Hindu religious celebrations, the RSS' festivals closely follow ritual formats derived from the Hindu traditions. This appropriation and overwriting of Hindu

traditional ritual heritage is not just a prerogative of the RSS but applies to all Sangh Parivar's symbolic activities. It is a phenomenon of great political significance which has resulted with Hinduism being 'nationalized' and the nation Hinduized [Basu et al.1993:40].

Ritual Construction of the Nation

This penchant for public ceremonies obviously reflects the role attributed to rituals by the Sangh Parivar. Indeed, the VHP was partly created in 1964 by the RSS with the scope of promoting Hinduism through the staging of public ceremonies. Being the chosen loci "for the transmission of national identity and ideology" [Edensor 2002:74], national rituals provide the social ideals and conventions they contribute to articulate [Edensor 2002:74 quoting Geertz 1993]. Spectacular examples of this frenetic activity are the many processions and large-scale festivals and rituals – *yatras* (processions) and *yagnas* (ritual public sacrifices) – that have characterised the recent history of India to arouse Hindu militancy and carry the Hindutva message across India, in every town and village. Between 1981 and 1983 the Sangh Parivar organised a huge number of mass meetings loosely based on religious ceremonies that was aimed at the celebration of the spirit of unity among Hindus and at promoting a Hindu resurgence. It was the mass conversion of Dalits to Islam in 1981 in Tamil Nadu – encouraged also by shrewd speculations released by the national press which claimed that Hindus (which make up over 80% of all India's population) would become a minority by the twenty-third century [Jaffrelot 1996:342] – that instilled a sense of insecurity and vulnerability in the Hindu community. In 1983 the VHP launched the *Ekatmata Yajna* (Sacrifice for Unanimity), one of the first successful attempts at defining Indian nation through the use of processional ritual action as a site for the legitimation of meanings and social values of the Hindutva. This *yajna* was followed in quick succession by the *Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yajna,* (more details on this later on) a gigantic operation that officially opened the campaign for the liberation of the birthplace of Ram at Ayodhya, and during which statues of Ram and Sita were placed on lorries and carried in procession across the country. The political instrumentalisation of religious rituals went on a *crescendo* in the subsequent years. The *Ram Shila Pujans* of 1989 marked another step in this process of creation of national

rituals. Advani's *Rath Yatra* of 1990[14] was possibly the most popular and successful one, although not the last one. The *Ekta Yatra, Janadesh Yatra, Suraj Yatra* and *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* all took place in the 1990s.

According to Golwalkar [1966:335], "[W]ithout a suitable technique no ideal, however great, can be realized." This technique consisted of a disciplined ritual practice. Always aware of the necessity of creating homogeneity among Hindu, the RSS saw to it to set up a rigorous daily practice, including a set of daily rituals and drills (including the chanting of few Sanskrit mantras and the hymn *Vande Mataram*) that would be observed simultaneously in all its *shakas* across the country to strengthen a feeling of unity and build discipline. It also devised an emblem (the *bagwa dhwaj*, the saffron flag) and a uniform consisting in the khaki shorts, white shirt, and black forage cap. The fact that the same rituals are performed on a daily basis in all the RSS branches across India gives a sense of simultaneity and helps creating homogeneity among the participants. The RSS emphasis on discipline, its uniforms, and the martial character of many of its processions and rituals (such as its own version of *Dasara*) all carry strong military connotations arguably aimed at stressing the vigour and manliness of the Indian nation.

Savarkar himself had acknowledged the importance of rites and rituals both as cultural markers (*samskriti*, Hindutva's third essential feature, includes *samksaras*, those "rites and rituals ceremonies and sacraments that makes a land a Holyland" [Savarkar 1942:95]) and as occasions that promote social cohesion and a shared sense of identity. During his youth, Savarkar took part in the organisation of those festivals, such as *Shivaji Utsav* and *Ganesh Utsav* whose celebration was originally promoted by the radical Congress leader Tilak. Even in London, Savarkar organised the celebration of *Rakshbandh* and *Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti* festivals for the expatriate community. Significantly, it was not just the shared sense of identity that was being celebrated by such rituals. Rather, it was the corporate character of it that these public festivals meant to commemorate. As he noted, "[T]he quaint customs and ceremonies and sacraments

[14] 25 September 1990 – 30 October 1990.

they involve, observed by some as a religious duty, by others as social amenities, impress upon each individual that he can live best only through the common and corporate life of the Hindu race" [Savarkar 1942:80-81]. In the next chapter it will be shown how, according to the Sangh Parivar, the Hindu community – and by extension the ideal Indian nation – is portrayed as an organic unity where the individual is submerged into larger entity of the community. Collectivism rather than individualism is the fundamental unit of their imagined nation.

The Sangh Parivar's rituals are innovative for three major reasons. First, they are new in that despite being inspired by existing Hindu ritual practices, they did not exist before as such. Although in India the ritual calendar is very vast and diverse, there never existed before an *Ektamata Yajna*, or a *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan*. Also, as we have just seen, these festivals are original in content, combining in novel formats different ritual elements borrowed from well-established Hindu customary traditions. But most importantly, they are innovative in scope. Traditionally this type of celebrations and rituals is usually carried out and performed by individuals to obtain personal merit for one's self or for one's family. Alternatively, people undertake pilgrimages and participate to mass celebrations to fulfil their personal vows and religious rites. On the contrary, the rituals introduced by the Sangh Parivar have a different purpose. As one of the Sangh Parivar leaders readily acknowledged, their main "thrust is towards giving a social and national direction to the people's devotion." [Seshadri 1984:174]. It is their *samajik* (social) and *rashtriya* (national) character that is innovative. These rituals are performed not for personal salvation but for the attainment of a corporate good. Indeed, despite their alleged antiquity, the Sangh Parivar celebrates *yatras* as tools for the promotion of national integration and of national identity, as *yatras*

> "ensured the survival of Indian civilization, helping it to preserve its continuity in time and its capacity to weave unity in all its seemingly maddening diversity. [...] It was one of the devices which the leaders of our society used to keep this national awareness alive generation after generation" [Kulkarni 1997:8].

Moreover, it is indeed the pedagogic character of *yatra* as a "*conscious* medium of people's education and mobilization" [ibid:9] rather than a personal religious

obligation that is dearest to the Sangh Parivar. Moreover, the Sangh Parivar's *yatras* beside being a means of political awakening, national integration and people's education and mobilisation, reinforce the established link between religion and politics – because these ceremonies partly reproduce religious festivals. Their impact on the Indian masses has been great and demonstration of religious fervour and militancy has since become ordinary matter. As a result, the Hindu nationalist movement has been able to exploit devotional rituals to which they attached fresh ideological meanings.

Another important novelty introduced by the Sangh Parivar processual activity is that while on other occasions, ritual celebrations tend to be linked to either a particular region or religious sect, the Sangh Parivar's *jagarans*, in their being performed for the attainment of a social and national merit, transcend caste, sect and regional differences. Indeed, Hindutva's processual activity being triggered by mass conversions of Dalits to Islam, was originally intended at celebrating the hypothetical unity of the Hindu's community. Unity is not only signified by promoting symbols common to all Hindus (such as the cow and the river Ganges for instance) or by employing processual strategies that touch and symbolically link the different corners of the country, but also by creating and promoting rituals that are not a prerogative of one particular sect or caste but that can be associated to the Hindu community at large. And finally, it is the culmination of this process of transformation of ritual activity from the purely religious to the more overtly political that produced *yatras* such as the 1990 Advani's *Rath Yatra* where at last the political became so explicit so as to compete with and sometimes overshadow the religious aspect of it.

That ritual action is considered paramount by the Sangh Parivar is also indicated by the fact that the VHP has established a *Hindu Parva Samvaya* – a department for the coordination of the Hindu festivals – and other numerous societies – *Hindu Samvaya Samiti* – in a variety of places with the purpose, and with the ultimate goal of re-awakening and promoting patriotic fervour by means of festivals. It is believed that it is through the promotion of patriotic festivals fashioned alongside established religious ceremonies that the weakness in the Hindu society – which is thought to be at the heart of India's subjection to foreign invasions – can be eliminated.

But for the VHP the festivals need to be reformed. It is only through the reorientation of ritual practices, through standardisation and coordination, and the promotion of 'universal practices'[15] that this ritual activity can truly become national – *Rashtriya Tyohar* – and fulfil its function as vehicle for the promotion of Hindu unity and renaissance [Jaffrelot 1995:208]. Thus the VHP's *Hindu Parva Samnvaya* and *Hindu Samnvaya Samiti* are engaged in the standardisation of all major Hindu festivals and rituals, to make them national and to ensure that all Hindus celebrate all festivals in unison.

The model according to which the VHP cadre aspired to reform Hindu rituals and festivals found inspiration from the *namaz*, the collective Muslim prayer. Indeed, it is through *namaz* that one is able to *see* Islam: by seeing thousand of believers that rise and bend in unison at the time of prayer. It is this lack of simultaneity and uniformity of the act of faith that make Hinduism and the Hindu identity non-visible [Jaffrelot 1996:Ibid]. The same can also be said about the lack among the Hindus of a common meeting place, where the Hindus could "vividly visualise and imbibe the feeling of oneness and the identity of their social and religious interests" [Moonje 1923:24 quoted in Jaffrelot 1996:22]. This necessity to endow Hinduism with homogeneity and unity was already alive among the Sangh Parivar early ideologues. The call for reform was so intensely felt that some called for the rewriting of a new *smirti* [Jaffrelot 1996:23], a new code of Hindu practices and cultural tradition. Swami Shraddhananda developed an action plan originally intended for the Hindu Mahasabha in which he proposed to build Hindu Rashtra Mandir in every important city and town that could accommodate large crowds [Jaffrelot 1996:22] and in which recitation of the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata would be held. Besides indicating the necessity of

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[15] www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions_of_VHP/hHindu%20Parv%20Samanvya/festivalfornationalintegration.htm Accessed on 23 November 2006.
The reorientation of festival practices consists primarily in the promotion of mutual participation in rituals and festivals belonging to different sects (the VHP mentions Budh and Mahavir Jayanti: respectively a Buddhist and Jain festival) and the widening of participation to festivals observed by Harijans and Girijans (Dalits and tribals). *Tilak dharana*, cow worship, hoisting of *om* and *bhagava* flags are enumerated among the universal practices to be promoted. While these symbols have been displayed regularly at VHP and other Sangh Parivar events, the promotion of *Ganesh Navaratri* and *Nimajjan* in Hyderabad, and of *Valmiki Mahavir*, *Ram Lila* and *Ram Navami* in Delhi are instances of the workings of several *Hindu Samnvaya Samiti* [ibid].

erecting common places of prayers, and of establishing a common liturgy, Shraddananda also envisaged the need to dedicate these temples to three mother deities equally worshipped by all Hindus: Gau Mata, Saraswati Mata and Bhoomi Mata[16]. A temple was eventually erected in 1936 near the Hindu Mahasabha's headquarters in Delhi with the financial help of Jugal Kishor Birla. Another one was constructed under Savarkar's directions in Ratnagiri in 1931 [Jaffrelot 1996:22]. But the effort ended there. According to Bhatt [2001] in most recent times, traditional forms of devotions, such as the practice of *aarti* at mass public rituals sponsored by the Sangh Parivar have been used to directly confront Muslims at Friday prayers and Christians and mark a "strategically provocative, violence-oriented transformation of the peaceful practice of offering devotion to and receiving blessing from the deities." [Bhatt 2001:190].

The *yajnas* and *yatras* that have criss-crossed the country on several occasions are not the sole examples of this strategy of ethno-religious mobilisation and innovative ritual activity. The Sangh Parivar is also working to propagate a specific form of Hinduism codified in six religious activities - the worship of the sun each morning, wearing of the *Om* symbol around the neck, the inscription of *Om* on visiting cards, letterheads, keeping an image of the family deity in the home and daily worship of it, the cultivation of the *tulsi* plant and regular attendance at a centre of faith. VHP leaders even urged that every Hindu household should fly a saffron flag [Jaffrelot 1996:348]. The saffron flag is one of the most potent symbols of the RSS which worships it as the *guru*. For Golwalkar the flag was a symbol of *dharma*, culture, tradition and ideal: a guiding star and an emblem of self-sacrifice and of knowledge [Golwalkar 1966:335-336]. Indeed, during Hindutva's celebrations saffron flags are meant to be flown on top of buildings, houses, shops, means of transport and so on. These flags are very important because besides donning a celebratory look to the locale reminiscent of Hindu religious holidays, they also visibly signify an ideological occupation of a public space – albeit only a temporary one. This could be even more so, if one considers that, until recently, according to the Flag Code of India (which defines

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[16] Shraddhananda Sanyasi, *Hindu Sangatan – Saviour of the Dying Race*, Delhi, Arjun Press, 1926:140-141 quoted in Jaffrelot 1996:22

the use and display of the national flag) private citizens were not entitled to fly the national flag except on occasions specified by the Government: Republic Day and Independence Day[17]. It could be argued that the flying of the saffron flag is somewhat done antagonistically to the national flag. Indeed, the members of the Sangh Parivar owe their primary loyalty not to the national flag but to the RSS's saffron flag. Indeed, for years the RSS rejected India's tricolour because of the use of the colour green (interpreted as a symbol of Islam) and of the Asokan wheel (a Buddhist symbol) [Bidwai 2004].

Despite being 'invented', these rituals are also deeply traditional and are celebrated reproducing the formats of familiar Hindu public ceremonies and mass gatherings. In this process three elements are particularly important: the locale, the decorations, and the programme. It is by looking at these elements that the *jagaran* recall Hindu religious celebrations. Rituals and processions are staged in sites rich in symbolic meanings and more often than not, the locations are important Hindu holy sites and pilgrimage centres. As we have already occasion to illustrate, the loci chosen to perform these public ceremonies are usually sites linked to Hindu religious traditions: either pilgrimage centres or holy places. For instance, Advani's 1990 *Rath Yatra* started from the holy city of Somnath (the day of Deendayal Upadhyaya's birth anniversary) and ended in Ayodhya, both important pilgrimage centres. Similarly, the VHP's huge procession *Ekatmata Yatra* of 1983 touched some of India's most important Hindu religious sites, such as: Nagpur, Somnath, Hardwar, and Rameswaram [Fig. 1]. By celebrating their mass rites in such sites already pregnant with strong religious sentiments and associations, a link is established between the religious and the political domain. Also, because Hindutva's *modus operandi* dutifully replicates religious formats of mass rituals (*yatras* and *yajnas* are typical forms of Hindu religious public ceremonies) this link becomes even more compelling. Second, the *lay* sites where the celebrations are held are decorated with flowers (marigolds) and archways as it would be in any other religious festive occasion.

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[17] The Flag Code was however recently amended on the 53rd anniversary of the Indian Republic in 2002 removing the restrictions which only allowed government offices and higher functionaries of government to fly the Indian flag freely.

Fig. 1 *Ekatmata Yatra* Route

However, it is the ceremonial programme of the Sangh Parivar's public celebrations that confers a Hindu flavour to them. Because the Sangh Parivar's calendar of ritual activities is very vast, obviously ceremonial programmes vary between one event and the other. However, there are a few elements that are common to many of them. In many cases these public festivals involve ceremonial processions. These can be very local affairs, small parades along the main road, or larger *yatras* linking different towns, regions of a state or of the whole country. These processions are usually characterised by a parade of chariots carrying images of various gods and goddesses, tableaux depicting different significant events of India's history, life-size portraits of saints and *sadhus*, freedom fighters, revolutionaries, martyrs and political leaders "who laid down their lives for the sake of *swadesh* and *swadharma*" [Seshadri 1984:141]. Often the processions are accompanied by the chanting of *Om*, of Vedic mantras and of *bhajans*, while conch-shells might be blown to welcome the cavalcades [Seshadri 1984:153,168]. Slogans hinting at the unity of all Indians or Hindus such as *Hindu-Hindu Ek Rahe, Ham sab Hindu hai,* and *Hindu sanghatam zindabad.* [Seshadri 1984:150] are also chanted. *Yatras* of this kind have always existed in India. Deities are carried in processions in many parts of the country on many occasions during the

course of the year and *yatras* covering the Chaturdhams[18] in the four directions are regularly performed. Therefore the Sangh Parivar's processual activity is modelled along a well-established and familiar format of Hindu ritual tradition. What is however significant is the more overtly political meaning that is associated to these ritual activities.

Thus the Sangh Parivar has set up a calendar of ritual action that reproduces culturally embedded processual traditions. They have created new rituals that, blurring the distinction between the religious and the political domain, are aimed at promoting Hindu unity. To do so, Hindutva's ritual action works through a strategy that draws internal and external boundaries to define who is in and who is out of the community of Indians. Indeed, Hindutva's processional ritual action has set the minimum common denominator of belonging and affiliation to the Hindu fold, neglecting obvious traditional divisions while stigmatising the others. And it is thanks to the rituals' symbolic potential that they become the privileged loci and more likely vehicles for the articulation of the Sangh Parivar's strategy for Hindu unity.

Hindutva's Hagiolatry

Another technique for the definition of the paradigms of India's national identity and the replacement of India's ideological foundation with Hindutva is to change or appropriate the pantheon of father figures and national icons. Founding fathers, those ideological figures of national inspiration, are constituent elements of the myth of the birth of the nation. These national icons are indeed important as they symbolically embody the values and ideals of the nation. During Nehruvism it was mostly nationalist leaders (among which Gandhi and Nehru dominated all the others in terms of popularity), the workers, government bureaucrats, the soldiers, and the common men and women that acquired iconic status. Instead, the Sangh Parivar's pantheon of inspirational figures includes gods and goddesses (Ram, Hanuman and Ganga Mata among others), historical figures like Shivaji, ideologues and nationalists such as Tilak, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Ambedkar, Bose, and Hindutva's founding

[18] The Chaturdhams are where the gods are believed to reside and are located across the subcontinent at the four cardinal points: Badrinath in the north, Puri in the east, Rameshwaram in south and Dvaraka in the west.

fathers: Savarkar, Gowalkar, Hedgewar, and Deendayal. According to Basu et al the Sangh Parivar, rather than having created a fixed and distinct intellectual lineage, is establishing an ever expanding "kinship network which stops only at the Muslims, the Christians and the 'secular', sometimes including figures that are also antagonistic." [Basu et al 1993:59]

In this process of redefinition of the parameters of nationalism through the promotion of its father figures, the Sangh Parivar employs a dual strategy. On the one hand it must transform its pantheon of iconic figures from being sectarian and partisan into *national* icons. Significantly, the Sangh Parivar's national ritual actions and mobilisation campaigns often coincide with the birth or death anniversary of its own leaders and iconic figures. This is a very effective strategy that encourages the growth in popularity of these iconic figures at the all-India level (sometimes these personalities are only well-known among the Sangh Parivar's supporters or in specific regions or states but marginal to or unheard of by the general public), strengthening their status as national leaders and also contributing to providing them with a sacred aura, in particular on those occasions when – as it happens – these celebrations replicate and evoke religious rituals. The main stages of the long *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* (that was dubbed *Rashtra Bhakti Ki Teerth Yatra* – Patriotic Pilgrimage [Kulkarni 1997]) that took place in 1997 coincided with important religious or other celebrations and 'centres of patriotic pilgrimage' [ibid:11]. For instance, the *Yatra* was started in Mumbai on May 17 and – after having toured south India – it reached Port Blair in the Andaman Islands on the very day of the birth anniversary of Savarkar [May 28]. It was on June 23, anniversary of the "martyrdom day" [Kulkarni 1997:56] of Mookerjee, that the *Yatra* reached Kolkatta. From there, the *Yatra* travelled across north India touching many religious centres, finally reaching Jammu on July 10, the birth anniversary of Mookerjee [see Fig. 2].

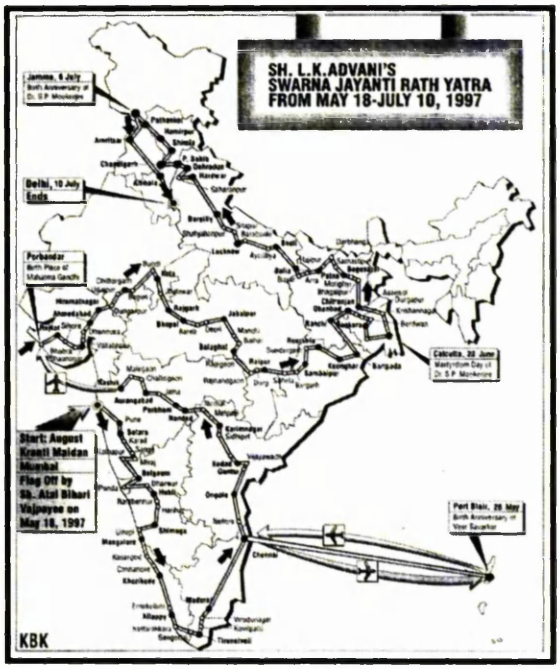

Fig. 2 Map of Advani's Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra

On the other hand, the Sangh Parivar makes every effort to re-appropriate already established personalities and national icons. This has been particularly relevant in the case of Ambedkar and of another popular nationalist hero, Subhas Chandra Bose. Nowadays, Ambedkar figures prominently in the Sangh Parivar's pantheon. On the first anniversary of the destruction of Ayodhya, Ambedkar's portrait adorned the Sangh Parivar dais along with other Hindu deities. The resort to Ambedkar in 1993 was not an isolated instance. In 1997 a picture of Ambedkar was included in the panel decorating Advani's *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* chariot [FIG.4]. Since then, Ambedkar has become a prominent figure in the Sangh Parivar's pantheon and has been repeatedly evoked on other ritual occasions. In 2000, on occasion of Ambedkar's birth anniversary, Khushau Thakre, BJP president, launched a Two-Day *Ambedkar Rath Yatra* around Delhi. Significantly, in the same year, Bangar Laxman – an untouchable – was elected president of the BJP[19]. In December 2002 the Uttar Pradesh BJP president, Vinay Katiyar, launched a 12-day *Ambedkar Yatra* as part of a campaign to promote cultural nationalism. Significantly, Katiyar portrayed Ambedkar as a supporter of cultural

[19] He would resign only sometime later having got involved in a bribe scandal. Before his resignation, in a speech done at the BJP National Council in Nagpur, he almost equated Ambedkar with Hedgewar.

nationalism. Allegedly quoting from Ambedkar's writings, Katiyar claimed that Ambedkar questioned the patriotism of the Muslims and that he had strongly opposed the partition of India [Singh 2002]. Signs of the 'appropriation' of Ambedkar were already evident in the 1980s. The *Bharata Ektamata Stotra*- one of the RSS daily prayers – was composed in its present form in 1980s[20]. A hymn to *Bharat Mata*, the prayer is an

> "eulogy of Bharat Mata – a compilation of the names, worthy to be ever-remembered, of the invaluable natural endowments and entities of our cultural heritage as also our national heroes representing our past and present ascendance in various fields" [21]

Fig. 3 Advani's Rath

Fig. 4 Left panel with nationalist heroes

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[20] It was approved by *Akhil Bharatiya Pratidini Sabha* of the RSS in 1985.

[21] *The Integral Spirit of Bharat. An Eulogy*: 7.

Ambedkar is listed among the "galaxy of men who set the highest standards in every sphere of human excellence"[22]. Here Ambedkar is praised for having converted to an indigenous religion (Buddhism[23]) – and therefore, not to Islam or Christianity, both considered foreign – and for his contribution to Hindu unity for having accepted the Poona Pact and renounced separate electorates for the untouchable, thus saving "the Hindu society from division into the so called high castes (*Savarna*) and Harijans (low castes)"[24].

In a similar strategy the Sangh Parivar has recently initiated a process of re-appropriation of Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose was incorporated in the Sangh Parivar's pantheon officially in 1996. He was hailed as a proponent of cultural nationalism. His writing taken out of context seemed to conform to BJP's political agenda: to reform society "according to our own ideals, to eradicate poverty and illiteracy, safeguard security and have a strong central government" [Gupta 1996]. Cooptation of Bose was later on reinforced when celebrating the nuclear explosion at Pokhran during the Bose's centenary anniversary. In both cases, the recent emphasis on Ambedkar and the appropriation of nationalist leaders such as Bose, are wholly political activities. Besides being instances of *transference* (transference of symbols of one particular ideology to a national level) these tactics betray the desire of the overtly upper caste Sangh Parivar to lend a hand towards the Dalits and the Buddhists in an attempt to restore harmony within Hinduism and create a united Hindu front [Assayag 1998:132] while also appropriating the nationalist tradition as its own.

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[22] Ibid: 5.

[23] The Sangh Parivar considers Buddhism as being a sort of a sect of Hinduism and Buddha as one of the *Dashavatar* of Hinduism. L K Advani – in 1998, attending an international conference on Buddhism at Sarnath – argued:

> "Buddha did not announce any new religion. He was only restating with new emphasis the ancient ideals of the Hindu-Aryan civilisation. He cleansed the faith and the customs that were prevalent then of the dust that had accumulated, and focused on the essential ideals of *Dharma*." [Bharatiya Janata Party. 1999. *Secularism. Rooted in India's Culture and Traditions.* New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Publications, page. 6].

[24] Ibid:120.

Fig. 5 Gandhi's Dandi March: Mural, BJP's Delhi's Headquarters

In this respect, and in the wider context of Hindutva's father figures, the controversy regarding the installation of a picture of Savarkar in the Central Hall of the Indian Parliament, directly opposite a portrait of Gandhi, who is usually regarded as the father of the Indian nation, is illustrative of this process of *transference* (from partisan to national) and re-appropriation of the history of nationalist movement rather than just of one of its leaders. On 26 February 2003 – the date commemorating Savarkar's death – accompanied by the chanting of *Swatantryaveer Savarkar Amar Rahe* (Long Live the brave freedom-fighter Savarkar) and *Jab tak Suraj Chand rahega, Savarkar tera naam rahega* (Your name will be with us till the Sun and the Moon will exist)[25], the Indian president A P J Abdul Kalam unveiled a portrait of Savarkar in the Central Hall of Parliament[26]. An exhibition on the life and work of Savarkar was also held in the Central Hall[27]. Beside the President, Abdul Kalam, the Vice-President, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, and the Health Minister, Sushma Swaraj participated to the ceremony[28]. Clearly, the installation of the portrait was a

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[25] 'President unveils Savarkar portrait in Parliament'. 26 February 2003 www.rediff.com/news/2003/feb/26prez.htm Accessed on 23 November 2006.

[26] The portrait was a present from Swatantryaveer Savarkar Seva Kendra and Swatantryaveer Savarkar Smarak Samiti of Mumbai and was drawn by Chandrakala Kumar Kadam [ibid].

[27] For the occasion the Lok Sabha secretariat released a booklet eulogising Savarkar. ['Out of Kala Pani, Again', Saba Naqvi Bhaumik and Smruti Koppikar *Outlook*, 6 September 2004].

[28] The unveiling ceremony was boycotted en masse by the opposition, though the decision to hang the portrait was earlier ratified by an all-party committee of Parliament, which included Congress and Left leaders.

symbolic event. Not only was the portrait as well as the locale highly symbolic. But the unveiling of Savarkar's portrait in Parliament was also symbolic for another set of reasons. First of all, Savarkar is not strictly a national icon but a father figure of only one particular ideology. By virtue of this only, the instalment of his portrait if not offensive was at least very partisan. Secondly, Savarkar is the ideologue of Hindutva which argues in favour of the creation of an Hindu nation. It is therefore a symbol of exclusion and of discrimination. By installing a portrait of Savarkar in the Central Hall of Parliament the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government made a statement against the pluralist notion of Indian nationalism and the founding principles of the Indian nation. After all, Savarkar is the most important ideologue of the Sangh Parivar and his writings form the core of their political agenda. Thirdly, because Savarkar was allegedly involved in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the installation of the portrait is also a symbolic attack on the values and on the inheritance of the nationalist movement. Moreover, Savarkar's portrait executed according to the aesthetic principles that characterises Hindutva iconography, makes the Central Hall of Parliament – and metonymically Parliament itself and therefore India's political institutions and its fabric – resemble any Sangh Parivar's headquarters, making the occupation and appropriation of the ideological space of the freedom movement by the Sangh Parivar even more dramatic.

On the other hand, the symbology of the locale is important too and it relates to the question of the sacralisation of space. According to Kertzer:

> "[E]ndowing certain spaces with sacrality is universal in the struggle for power, as it is in governance. Space is marked off in away that not only brings to mind a certain view of history but also links those in the present to that sacred past". [Kertzer 1996:25]

This strategy of sacralisation of space involves not only the selection of special hallowed sites for the celebration of special ceremonies but also the prevention of any ritual pollution of these spaces (as in the case of Ayodhya). The Central Hall of the Indian Parliament is the equivalent of India's secular temple of the nation[29], where

[29] On the symbolic value of Parliament see Chapter 4

portraits of the most significant figures of the nationalist movement are hung. The Hall, and indeed the whole of India's Parliament House Estate is a visual commemoration of the nationalist movement, of its martyrs, its legacy and of the principles that form the foundation of the Indian nation and one of the most revered national monuments. The selection of portraits is in itself symbolic, representing through the images of these iconic figures of the nationalist movement by association those important values such as non-violence, pluralism, secularism on which the Indian nation rests. It is these founding principles that are challenged by the installation of the portrait of an icon of the political project for a Hindu nation. Indeed, the instalment of Savarkar's portrait in the Central Hall of Parliament which host portraits of other nationalist was a challenge to founding values of the Indian nation[30].

Fig. 6 RSS New Year Card 1993ca

The appropriation of the history of the nationalist movement by the Sangh Parivar in this case was realized by re-inventing Savarkar as a nationalist and national hero. To be fair, in his youth Savarkar was a patriot. Inspired by Mazzini, he founded *Abhinav Bharat Society*, a revolutionary terrorist group which organized attacks on British authorities. However, his patriotic credentials were seriously discredited after

[30] For a list of the paintings hung in Central Hall see Chapter 4

his arrest in 1911 for the murder of the Collector of Nasik. Savarkar repeatedly begged the British authorities for his release on condition of his abandonment of political activity. It was on these terms that he was eventually released in from Andaman prison in 1924. However, as soon as the British Government revoked these conditions in 1937, Savarkar immediately resumed his political activities. He was elected president of the Hindu Mahasabha and from then onwards, Savarkar worked against the Congress-led nationalist movement. He repeatedly offered his loyal collaboration with the British Government to suppress the nationalist movement and promised to make the Montague-Chelmsford reform of 1919 successful. During the Civil Disobedience movement carried out by the Congress in 1940-1941 and in 1942, after the launch of the Quit India movement when under Congress instructions Indian politicians were invited not to cooperate with British authorities and resign from their governmental posts in protest, Savarkar, as leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, instructed the Sanghatanists "holding any post or position of vantage in the government services, [to] stick to them and continue to perform their regular duties" [Noorani, 1995]. The Hindu Mahasabha's leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, even served as Finance Minister in Fazl ul Haq's Cabinet in the Bengal Presidency until February 1943. Since his release from jail he also advocated the impossibility of Hindus and Muslims to live together and subscribed to the two-nation theory in 1937 (even before Jinnah did in 1940) in his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha session. Such is the "fierce nationalistic spirit that contributed to India's liberation" [Noorani 2003:36, quoting Advani] that is celebrated with the reinvention of Savarkar as a nationalist hero. Indeed, the reinvention of Savarkar as a national hero, on the same league of those who fought – not pleaded with – the British authorities, is a challenge to the pluralist and ideological legacy of the nationalist movement and to the secular and constitutional framework of independent India.

Honouring Savarkar is another instance of the process of establishing a new symbolic order for India that is threatening the foundations of the old Indian republic based on the ideals of inclusion, tolerance and secularism. That this was the case, is clear from a statement release by Narendra Modi, Gujarat's Chief Minister when a portrait of Savarkar was installed in the National Assembly Vidhan Sabha, only three

months after the unveiling of a similar portrait in Delhi, on 28 May and on the occasion of Savarkar's 120th birthday. Quite openly, (and oblivious to the riots that only recently had inflamed the state) Chief Minister Narendra Modi praised Savarkar's contribution in identifying India as a 'Hindu Rashtra'[31].

Indeed, the unveiling of Savarkar's portrait is only the culmination of a process of iconisation initiated by the Sangh Parivar some time before. Since the late 1990s the Sangh Parivar has launched a systematic – and controversial – campaign to give Savarkar respectability and anoint him a national hero. The year 2001 saw the release of a film dedicate entirely to Savarkar. This film – entitled simply *Veer Savarkar*[32] – is the Sangh Parivar's first cinematic venture to give popular exposure to its ideology and political philosophy. This film was almost entirely funded by the Savarkar Darśan Trust and Savarkar Film Fundraising Committee[33]. Sudhir Phadke – the film music director, also known as of Babuji who had lobbied for this film for over a decade – toured the world to appeal to the Indian diaspora to donate for the realisation of this film. According to the film's director – Ved Rahi – this was the first film "totally funded by the people"[34]. However, despite being 'a film of the people for the people' – as the film slogan claimed – considerable funds were also donated by the Government of Maharashtra (which donated 5 million Rupees), and the then Prime Minister Vajpayee, who not only contributed to the collection of 5 million Rupees during his American tour, but also donated 15 million Rupees to go towards the film publicity campaign. The influence of the Sangh Parivar – whose leaders (among which Bal Thackeray, Vajpayee and Advani) were invited to special screenings arranged before the film went on general release – was visibly manifest despite claims that the film was a faithful historical reconstruction of Savarkar's life. Indeed, the film was another

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[31] http://news.indiainfo.com 28 May 2003. Accessed 30 May 2003.

[32] The film, which cost over six Crores Rupees, was granted entertainment-tax exemption. This is measure – that brings the price of tickets down – is usually taken by the state to encourage viewers to see films that are considered important. Another film *Asoka*, released a year later, enjoyed the same exemption.

[33] 'Vajpayeeji helped me make this film', Rediff on Net. November 27, 2001, www.hvk.org/articles/1101/253.html Accessed on 23 November 2006.

[34] Ibid.

attempt of the Sangh Parivar to place the controversial character of Savarkar on the same level of other revered nationalist heroes.

Only six month after the release of *Veer Savarkar* and ten months before the unveiling of Savarkar's portrait in the Central Hall of Parliament, Advani visited Port Blair the capital of the Andaman Island. Advani was there in his capacity of Union Home Minister to participate in a ceremony hailing the inauguration of Port Blair's new extended airport. During the ceremony Port Blair airport was renamed Veer Savarkar Airport[35]. The event was highly publicised and several national dailies published half-page advertisements of the event[36]. Forty-eight journalists from Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi were officially invited to the ceremony. Savarkar's own son, Vishwas Savarkar, and other family members along with Sudhir Phadke, *Veer Savarkar*'s music director, were also invited. Few days before Advani's visit, a plaque was installed in what was Savarkar's cell in the infamous *Kalapani* jail. The plaque quite openly celebrated Savarkar as the leader who gave the country "*mantra* of Hindutva, equality among Hindus, Hindu nationhood, Akhand Bharat"[37]. To leave none in doubt that the celebration of Savarkar was part of the strategy that sought to replace the inclusive concept of Indian nationalism espoused by the Indian national movement with the more narrow, exclusivist concept of Hindutva, Advani on that occasion hailed Savarkar as the unsung hero of Indian nationalism. Acknowledging his ideological

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[35] Besides Port Blair Airport, the name of the park outside the Andaman's jail *Kalapani*, was changed from Shaheed Park to Savarkar Park. The Andaman Airport was not the only one that was renamed during the NDA government. In December 2001 Vajpayee renamed the Airport Terminal Civil Enclave of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, 'Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia', after the late BJP senior politician and Vice President (1980-1998) who was a passionate hardliner of Hindutva and who played a key role in propagating the BJP's Ayodhya campaign. In April 2002, Bhopal Airport was renamed 'Raja Bhoj Airport', after the 11th century king of Malwa. While the renaming of Gwalior Airport can be seen as a commemorative gesture towards a supporter of Hindutva, the renaming of Bhopal can be instead framed within the Sangh Parivar's attempt at recovering and honouring pre-Moghul Indian history. Despite legends suggesting that Bhopal was erected on the site where Raja Bhoj built a dam (*pal*) – hence the name – Bhopal's history is undeniably linked to Mughal rule, as Bhopal modern city was developed by Dost Mohammed Khan, an Afghan chief that ruled during Aurangzeb times. Hence the desire by the Sangh Parivar to change the connotation.

[36] 'The Savarkar Story: Putting the Facts Straight'. *People's Democracy* Vol. XXVI, no. 21, 2 June 2002. http://pd.cpim.org/2002/june02/06022002_savarkar_story.htm Accessed on 23 November 2006.

[37] *Hindustan Times*, 5 May 2002.

debt to Savarkar and to Hindutva, Advani, in his speech delivered at the naming ceremony, also added – using a language rich in religious connotations – that India's true patriot should consider Andaman's Cellular Jail their *thirthshtan* [pilgrimage site] and "visit the place as often as they can"[38].

Another instance of this relentless strategy of gradual legitimisation of Sangh Parivar's icons and appropriation of the nationalist movement is provided by Advani's participation in a public ceremony in Delhi[39] to rename a park in Delhi in Lodhi Colony. The Deputy Prime Minister inaugurated the Veer Savarkar Park[40] and unveiled the statue of Savarkar "to remember the national hero, freedom fighter, an ageless thinker and a devout nationalist"[41]. On that occasion, Advani suggested that the New Delhi Municipal Corporation should organise an essay competition on the life

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[38] 'Emotional Advani renames airport after Vir Savarkar', Ajay Suri, *The Indian Express*, 5 May 2002. A further step in the Sangh Parivar's campaign for the rehabilitation of Savarkar was taken by the BJP-led NDA government through Ram Naik, the then Union Petroleum Minister, who commissioned the instalment of a statue accompanied by several plaques carrying quotations of Savarkar, Madanlal Dhingra (a Savarkar acolyte who assassinated a British officer), Bhagat Singh and Subhash Chandra Bose, inside Anandman Cellular jail. The statue was only ready in May 2004 when the NDA had been defeated in the 14th Lok Sabha Elections. Ram Naik's successor, Mani Shankar Aiyer, ordered the plaque bearing Savarkar's quote to be removed and replaced it with Mahatma Gandhi's words before the inauguration ceremony held 9 August 2004, thus raising considerable controversy. In September 2004, the BJP has urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to restore the plaque. In the same period, the party launched a day-long 'satyagraha' to be held in Port Blair on September 22, when about 125 BJP MPs were led in a procession along the busy streets of Port Blair by Sushma Swaraj behind a portrait of Savakar, demanding the restoration of the plaque. In Mumbai, the capital of the state of Maharashtra where elections were to be held shortly thereafter, the controversy was quickly transformed into an electoral issue. ['Real politik: Advani to take Savarkar issue national' *Times of India*, 20 September, 2004.]

[39] August 10 2002.

[40] Mumbai has the most famous public place erected in honour of Savarkar: Swatantryaveer Savarkar Smarak. This seaside memorial erected on a plot of 6,650 sq meters provided by Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has a 20000-sq.ft plaza where a life size statue of Veer Savarkar is standing surrounded by a garden and two fountains giving the whole surrounding an impressive look. The Samarak has a National Museum of Revolutionaries, and Auditorium, Research and Reference library, Military training Centre, yogic and Physical Training Centre, Medical Centre and Mobile Hospital and also a Book Trust. The Samarak hosts several clubs: a boxing club, a rifle club, a mountaineering club, plus a Savarkar School of Martial Art. Interestingly the activities organised by these clubs are all geared towards the development of strength, physical or otherwise, in line with Savarkar's/Sangh Parivar's desire to create a muscular nation.

[41] 'Advani Inaugurates Savarkar Park'. *Tribune News Service* 10 August, 2002.

of Savarkar for the school students so that Indian children would acquaint themselves with the life history of Savarkar to get inspiration from these "freedom fighters".

Interestingly, the renaming of the capital's park was not an isolated issue. Previously, the Sarojini Nagar Market had been renamed after Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and his statue had been installed. Obviously the appropriation of public places encourages practices of public display of prominent Hindu/Hindutva symbols. Moreover, this process of appropriation and renaming of public places – airports, squares, and so on – concerns also the trend of changing of city's names that have recently swept the country. The changing of city names is considered important by the Sangh Parivar leadership. Vernacular toponymies are preferred to those of foreign derivation. Bombay has become Mumbai; Calcutta, Kolkata; Madras is now Chennai; Baroda, Varodara; Cawnpur – Kanpur, just to name a few. Of a different kind are the attempts of the BJP-led UP government at the beginning of the 1990s to change Muslim city names into Hindu names: Allahabad to Prayagraj, Mughal Sarai to Deendayal Nagar, Gaizabad to Saket and Lucknow to Lakshimipur [Malik and Singh 233]. In February 2004, the BJP Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharati expressed her intention to rename the state capital Bhopal Bhojapal, in honour of its legendary king Raja Bhoj. She is credited to have said that this move was intended "to give the city a distinct identity"[42].

Savarkar is obviously not the only one who is being celebrated by the Sangh Parivar. On 31st March 1999 the Prime Minister Vajpayee took part to a celebration to commemorate another important icon of the Sangh Parivar pantheon: the Maharatta ruler Shivaji. The occasion was the 319th death anniversary of Shivaji[43]. On that occasion the prime minister paid homage to Shivaji garlanding a statue raised in his honour at Fort Raigad. He addressed the crowds assembled for the event from a dais erected in the spot from where Shivaji allegedly used to address his followers and then

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[42] 'Bhopal to be renamed Bhojapal?' *Sify News*. 3 February 2004. Available on http://sify.com/news/fullstory.php?id=13378554. Accessed 23 November 2006.

[43] The anniversary of Shivaji's coronation was held on 6th June. Significantly, on that day the Indian Government issued a special currency coin in honour of Shivaji. ['PM Urges People to Emulate Shivaji'. *The Hindu*, 1 April 1999].

proceeded to perform *pooja* at the nearby Jagadishwar Mandir. It is understood that prime ministers have to attend a variety of official ceremonies and Vajpayee's participation in this sort of commemoration might not be significant per se. Yet, Shivaji, and in particular the anniversary of Shivaji's death, are very significant for the Sangh Parivar and the official participation of the Prime Minister in such a celebration is especially noteworthy[44]. The first reason that makes the occasion meaningful is that Shivaji is a central character and one of the foremost icons of the Hindutva's pantheon. Shivaji's coronation is one of the six fundamental rituals observed yearly by the RSS. The Maharata Hindu nationalist party Shiv Sena obviously takes inspiration from Shivaji. Celebration of Shivaji within the RSS is not just once-a-year affair. A slogan sung at end of every RSS *shaka* after the Hindi/Marathi prayer – *Rashtra guru Samarth Ramdas ki jai* – is sung in honour of Ramdas, Shivaji's guru [Basu et al. 1993:18]. Celebration of Shivaji dates back to the late nineteenth century. It was the Maharashtrian social reformer M G Ranade who, with his 1894 *Notes on the Growth of Marathi Literature*, began the cult of Shivaji. Ranade chose Shivaji as a representative of a 17th century revival interpreted as a kind of protestant movement that transcended caste differences. Bankim Chatterjee also reinterpreted Shivaji as an ideal man, cultural hero and nation builder. With time, and under the patronage of radical Indians such as Tilak, the revival of Shivaji the Maratha warrior-king now revered as the conqueror of the Mughals became more prominent. Tilak took up the cult of Shivaji emphasizing the role of his guru Ramdas as an apostle of Hindu militancy. The Prime Minister's public participation to this celebration not only lifts the occasion from a relatively local affair circumscribed to the ritual tradition of one of India's countless associations, to one event of national importance. But also, by doing so, he contributed to blur the boundaries between the Sangh Parivar's cultural and ritual make-up and the one of the nation.

The other reason that merits discussion regards the symbolic significance that such an event entails. Shivaji is not just a Maharatta ruler. He is a symbol of martial Hinduism and stands for Hindu resurgence against Muslim rulers. Indeed, paying his

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[44] Significantly, only one other Prime Minister has visited the Raigad Fort before. Indira Gandhi attended the celebrations to mark Shivaji's 300th death anniversary in 1980.

tributes to Shivaji, the Prime Minister exhorted the crowd assembled to emulate Shivaji and said that Shivaji was a "master of social and cultural upliftment". He said that Shivaji stood for unity, harmony, democracy and *swavalamban* (self-reliance). Vajpayee also took advantage of the occasion to load the event with patriotic fervour. Announcing a grant of 1 crore Rupees to be devoted to the maintenance of the Raigad Fort the Prime Minister claimed that all India's historic forts are symbolical "'Kirti Stumbhas' (pillars of pride) of the nation and source of patriotic inspiration for the people [...] for building a strong and prosperous India"[45].

The Sangh Parivar's pantheon of iconic figures is a reflection of the exclusivist character of their brand of nationalism. The historical figures, the ideologues and the nationalists that are currently revered, not to mention the mythological figures such as Bharat Mata, Ram, Krishna and Hanuman are symbols and expressions of an ideology that privileges Hindu cultural traditions. Besides, some of the Sangh Parivar's iconic figures (its ideologues who elaborated the philosophy of Hindu nationalism, India's historical leaders and god and goddesses) are also symbols of a Hindu resurgence against Muslim oppression. Appropriation and cooptation of these figures is therefore highly symbolical in that it strengthens a Indian/Hindu national identity. Moreover, by co-opting figures who do not necessarily belong to the Hindu nationalist ethos such as Gandhi, Ambedkar and Bose, the Sangh Parivar aims at appropriating the nationalist movement and the nationalist past – which both played a crucial role in post-colonial imagination of India. This is particularly obvious with regards to the most important icon of the Hindutva movement: the god Ram who, along with the epic poem the Ramayana, has by now come to represent both the golden age of the Hindu nation and an aggressive type of Hinduism. All this will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[45] 'For a Strong and Prosperous India' had been the BJP slogan for some time. Earlier, on the same day, the Prime Minister took part to another public ceremony. This time Vajpayee was in Mumbai to rename Mumbai international airport as Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport. The renaming of Mumbai's international airport was preceded by often-violent agitations organised by the local Marathi party Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena leadership is not unusual in organising this sort of agitation for the promotion of a Marathi identity. Not only the name of the city of Bombay has since changed its original name, becoming Mumbai, but shopkeepers were also forced to rewrite the names of their shops in Marathi [Sardesai 1999].

Concluding Remarks

The previous chapter established that the symbolic capital that emerged after independence was characterised by images of modernity, industrialisation, and development. It represented India as a country on the move, steeped in tradition yet boldly facing the challenges of the twentieth century. If Indians were deprived of their cultural markers they were represented as indefatigable workers engaged in the project of nation building and labouring for the well-being of the whole nation. Values of secularism, democracy and modernity constituted the foundation of this particular imagination. The state implemented this imagined India through a well-articulated programme of social engineering epitomised by a concerted state propaganda activity that aimed at transforming India and facilitating the passage to modernity and hence encouraging people to adapt to the new needs of the modern state. Accordingly, at the base of this propaganda activity was the belief that modernity was a social changer. Thus, state activity was mainly aimed at educating the people and accelerating the transformation brought along by modernity, following the assumption that Indian masses were fundamentally backward and not able to understand modernity and change their behaviour accordingly and therefore necessitating the interventions of a benevolent state.

On the contrary, the Sangh Parivar propounds a form of cultural nationalism and it answers to questions of nation, nationhood and national identity by using symbols and symbolic constructions clearly derived from the Hindu heritage. Because in general these symbols are steeped in traditions and already popular currencies of communication the Hindutva's idiom is a highly emotionally charged and very effective language. In this chapter we looked at the Sangh Parivar's highly diversified strategy of symbolic communication. The methods used to propagate their imagined India are of two kinds. On the one hand the Sangh Parivar makes use of the state communication machinery both at the national and at the state level by promoting cultural programmes celebrating its iconic figures and historical events but also by issuing commemorative stamps, renaming public spaces, erecting statues and installing portraits of its leaders and heroes. On the other hand, the Sangh Parivar's communication strategy is supported by a series of symbolic activities of ethno-

religious mobilisation that usually elude the sphere of official state activity. These symbolic public performances are by and large organised and carried out under the aegis of various Sangh Parivar's organisations and affiliates. But as Nehru was engaged in a programme of social engineering, so is the Sangh Parivar who aims at creating a *Hindu Rashtra* based on a homogenised Hindu tradition, organised around principles of *dharma* and *Samskriti*, or in Assayag's words, "to reconfigure religion on a political base, or politics on a religious one, so as to deconstruct the national inheritance." [Assayag 1998:141]. The Sangh Parivar's double-edged strategy has the advantage of encouraging the imposition of a particular ideology with its symbols, myths and rituals onto to the whole national territory. By doing so, it obviously encourages the blurring of the distinction between what is specific to a particular ideology and what is *national*, so that as to suggest a correspondence between Hindu and Indian, the Sangh Parivar and the Nation. Having established in this chapter the strategies of dissemination of the Sangh Parivar's idea of India, in the following chapter I explore the symbolism with it associated.

CHAPTER 6

One Country, One People, One Culture

Having analysed Hindutva's strategies to disseminate Hindu nationalism, I will now examine the Sangh Parivar's symbolic capital. Specifically, I will identify the cultural building blocks of Hindu nationalism, the myths, memories and symbols of Hindu identity that have been institutionalised, popularised and canonised under the aegis of the Sangh Parivar's affiliates and more recently of the BJP-led state and national governments. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first one addresses with how the Sangh Parivar imagines the Indian nation. Hindu nationalists filter their representation of the nation through the concepts of sacred geography and undivided India, or *Akhand Bharat*. They employ a wide range of symbols to convey these two fundamental notions of patria according to Hindutva, such as the symbolic paradigm of a gendered personification of the nation (*Bharat Mata*), and the use of rivers sacred to Hinduism as metonymic representations of the nation. Section two considers the ways in which the Indian state, its nature and role towards the individual and India's communities is perceived. Questions of majoritarianism and organicity form the basis of this ideal state and are articulated through both the concept of *Hindu Rashtra* and the hierarchical organisation of society represented in the symbolism of the mythological *Virat-Purusha*.

The third section examines attributes of Indian identity and those symbols selected to articulate it. This identity, which coincides with Savarkar's concepts of Hindu identity, is not based on civic principles of nationality, but is ethnically and culturally defined. Cultural symbols such as the cow, the Hindi language, and less definable common practices and attributes that are deemed to be inherent to the Indian/Hindu character and ethos (e.g., strength, masculinity, tolerance) construct concepts of national identity. Symbols of strength as in the case of the nuclear explosions at Pokhran and the construct of the proud, confident Indian signify masculinity. A process of othering also defines the Indian/Hindu self. The issue of 'natural born Indians' raised during the 1999 electoral campaign highlights the

tendency to define Indianness along cultural and ethnical lines. The renewed concern for those who are commonly called Persons of Indian Origin [PIOs] and Non-Resident Indians [NRIs] is also illustrative of the emphasis on the ethnic factors of Indian nationality. Closely related to this argument are attempts to secure international legitimacy through using symbols promoting images of national pride, strength and militarism that converge to establish a novel image of India. The show *Satyamev Jayate* thus serves as a platform devised to showcase India's new stature in the international arena. The BJP's manifesto *For a Proud and Prosperous India*, the National Democratic Alliance Government's nuclear and aggressive defence programme and its diplomatic mission all underscore the desire to "regain a place of honour in the comity of great nations" [Vajpayee 1999]. The fourth and concluding section analyses the Hindu god Ram. The imagery associated with Ram projects a highly versatile and multi-layered symbol that encapsulates and conveys the complex notions of nationalism and nationhood delineated in the three preceding sections.

Bharat, not India

> "The countless spots of pilgrimages, temples and Ashramas, which have been till now looked upon mainly as symbols of our *Punya Bhoomi* – a holy land – have now acquired a new an vital emphasis; they are symbols of a common *Matru Bhoomi* as well"
>
> [Seshadri 1984:174]

Hindutva nationalism is based on a territorial and cultural definition of the nation. In the Sangh Parivar's speeches, publications, and publicity material, India is variously represented as a map, as *Akhand Bharat* (literally, undivided India), as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), or both and is metonymically epitomised by its mountain ranges and great rivers. According to Edensor the conception of the nation in spatial terms is a complex process that includes several

> "national forms of spatialisation which interweave with each other to consolidate a strong cognitive, sensual, habitual and affective sense of national identity, providing a common-sense spatial matrix which draws people and places together". [Edensor 2002:37]

The interplay among these distinct forms is evident in the image of *Bharat Mata* superimposed on a pre-partition map of the subcontinent, and in the prominent features (sacred rivers, mountains, pilgrimage sites, *tirthas* and *dhams*) marked on a physical map of pre-partition India.

Mapping the Nation

Cartographic representations are the most immediate and visible symbols of the nation[1]. Powerful graphic symbolic markers of Indianness, maps were widely used and reproduced during the Nehru years in official publications and other propaganda materials. In line with Nehruvian notions of civic nationalism, the map was a referential signifier, pre-eminently identifying a bounded administrative territory as the space of primary belonging [Edensor 2002:39]. The Sangh Parivar also uses cartographic representations of India. In this case, however, maps individuate a national territory, which is primarily cultural. In disaccord with the definition of India as a bounded administrative space, Hindutva's cartographic representations of India tend to reproduce 'grand landscapes' [Edensor 2002:37] and are significantly devoid of visible political borders. Borders, however, facilitate locating the Indian community in time and space [Smith 1991:16], and for the Sangh Parivar it is specific geographical features that provide symbolic and political boundaries. As Edensor as argued, it is "natural borders formed by seas, rivers, and mountains, that forestall invasion and contain culture and history, sustaining mythical continuities" [Edensor 2002:40].

India's geographical and physical features constitute the basis of Hindutva's ideology. According to Savarkar, India's topography is central to defining the Hindu/Indian nation. The word Hindu itself – which Savarkar considers equivalent to the adjective Indian, rather than a marker of religious orientation – identifies the Indians in those people inhabiting the land on the eastern side of the river Sindhus, thus bestowing a geographical boundary to the Indian nation. According to Balraj Madhok [1982] it was specifically the Hindu tradition that had allowed for an

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[1] See Assayag [1998:128-129] and Ramaswamy [2003] on the popular use of the map of India in political literature and publicity material. Both mention the 1989 electoral campaign centred around images of the map of India. According to Assayag, this was a obvious example of the use of the map as logo [Anderson 1983:175].

unprecedented awareness of the geographical and territorial unity of India among the common people[2]. The seven holy rivers and mountains, and the large number of *ashrams* and pilgrimage centres had given consciousness of the size and the geographical landmarks of the nation. In particular, India's physical features had been constant reminders not simply of the territorial unity of the Indian nation but also – and most importantly – of its cultural unity [Madhok 1982:13].

Pictures 1-3 well illustrate this point. Figure 1 is a reproduction of a poster issued by the Sangh Parivar representing India as a sacred geography. Here, India's natural features sacred to the Hindus and religious landmarks are only shown. These are India's "endless hollowed spots of pilgrimage and Melas" that have acted as "bulwarks for preserving the nation's psyche rich with the spirit of cultural and spiritual oneness."[3]

Fig. 1

[2] For Madhok [1982] this is something that it is understood by everybody (that is everybody who partakes of the Hindu religious traditions): rich and poor, literate and illiterate.
[3] *The Integral Spirit of Bharat*:4.

Similarly, Figure 2 and 3[4] present an image of India as a sacred geography. In Fig. 2, only India's sacred rivers [or *Lok Matas* – "motherly streams nurturing and nourishing our people for countless generations [...] symbolis[ing] the unending flow of our national life"[5]] and mountains are depicted.

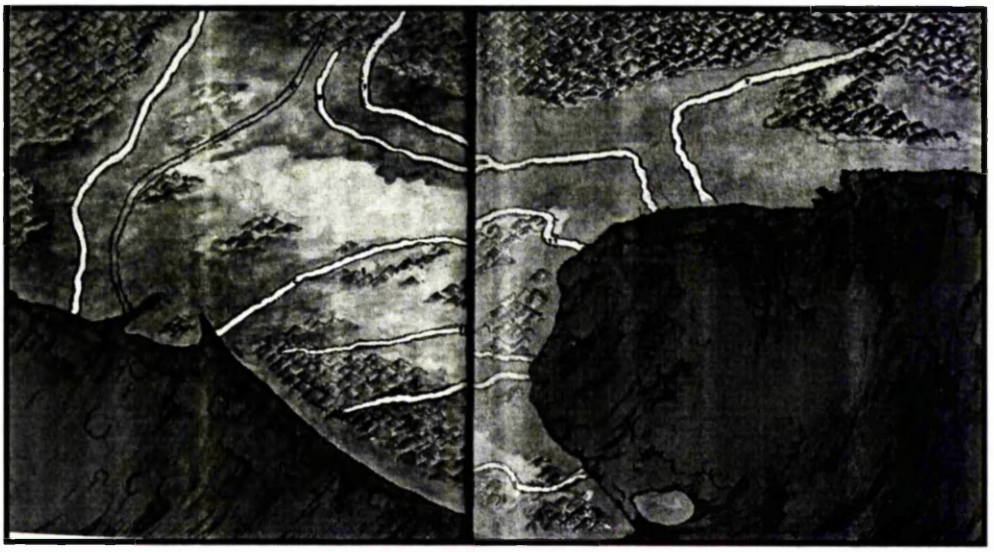

Fig. 2

In Fig. 3, on a blank and borderless territory (bounded only by the Himalayas and the Indian ocean) 18 sites are selected as tools of orientation [Brosious 2005] for national identification: Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Kashi, Kanchi, Ujjayini, Vaishali, Dvarika, Jagannathapuri, Takshashila, Gaya, Prayag (Allahabad), Patna, Vijayanagar, Indraprastha (Delhi), Somnath and Amristar. Significantly the picture reproduces some historical heritages and some modern signs of Indianness. Alongside images of the *Narasimha* Temple of Vijayanagar and of Amritsar's Golden temple, the illustration includes pictures of the Ashokan Capital, of the rebuilt Somnath Temple and of the not-yet built temple in Ayodhya. Thus, this illustration – and by extension the *Ekatmata Stotra* itself – by including markers that refer directly to India as a modern nation-state such as the Ashoka's Capital (India's national emblem) attempts to root modern India in a mythological Hindu past, while portraying it as the legitimate successor of India's

[4] Ibid: 12-15.
[5] Ibid: 4.

Hindu civilisation. Indeed, despite the inclusion of Sikh and Buddhist symbols, this map does not mark any of India's Muslim heritage sites.

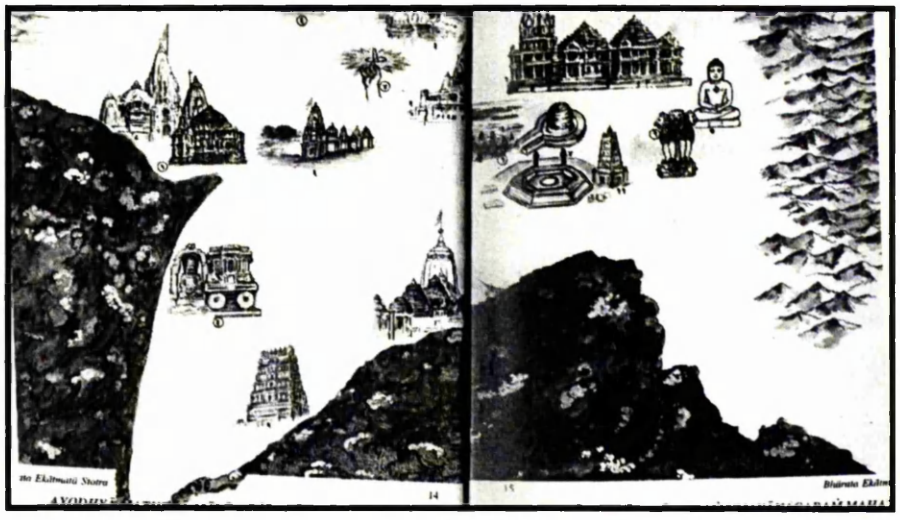

Fig. 3

Akhand Bharat

For the Sangh Parivar, this map without political borders represents *Akhand Bharat*, undivided India. The concept of *Akhand Bharat* emerged from nationalist historical narratives and was part of the definition of India's national identity. It was Golwalkar who stressed the importance of defining the natural borders of Hindustan. In "We or our nationhood defined" (1939) Golwalkar refers to India or Hindustan as the "lands from sea to sea". According to the Hindutva's ideologue, *Akhand Bharat*'s cultural boundaries stretch from Afghanistan to Burma and beyond including also Sri Lanka:

> "...this great country of ours extending in the north from the Himalayas – with all its branches spreading north, south, east and west, and with the territories included in those great branches – right up to the southern ocean inclusive of all the island is one great natural unit" [Golwalkar 1966:124-124 in Basu et al:27].

Indeed, the map that the Sangh Parivar uses in its representations of India includes Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet and Afghanistan and beyond [Fig.4-7]. According to Assayag [1998:128] at the core of the ideal of India as *Akhand Bharat* lays "[t]he 'racial theory of Indian civilisation' developed by British Orientalists and ethnologists at the end of the nineteenth century" which saw the Indian subcontinent as a culturally uniform and homogenous entity disrupted by the Muslim

invasion. Central to this redrawing of India's boundaries is an aggressive historical revisionism according to which India lived through an uninterrupted golden age of prosperity before the Muslim conquest and which interprets the whole of South Asia's history as an eternal war between Muslims and Hindus.

Fig. 4 *Akhand Bharat*

Fig. 5 RSS Calendar 1990s

There is a distinction to be made here between boundaries and frontiers. While the first one is political, a frontier marks a gradual demarcation between two distinct territories. The *Akhand Bharat* map that is usually dominant in Hindutva's iconography has frontiers rather than boundaries and these frontiers do not coincide with the political boundaries of independent India nor with the boundaries of the British Raj. On the contrary, they include the idea of India's cultural expansion in the subcontinent and in South East Asia. The slogan *Akhand Bharat* partly conjures up the idea of a land without clear political borders because a cultural land can only have rather vague frontiers. Therefore, the Sangh Parivar's basic creed rests upon the establishment of

Akhand Bharat and the undoing of the India-Pakistan partition. In the post-independence national imagination, partition was crucial to "searing the lineaments of India's territorial boundaries deep into the national consciousness ... (through) the popular sacralization of territory" [Gupta 1996:17]. This sacralization also meant that India would not stand any secession, division or separation. However, for Hindutva partition not only meant the tearing apart of a sacred and allegedly undivided homeland (as conveyed by the slogan *Akhand Bharat*), but the event of partition also hindered India's gaining of full independence: *azadi abhi adhuri hai* (Freedom is still incomplete)[6].

Fig. 6 Sangh Parivar's Dipawali's Card. 1990s.

Fig. 7 Cover of Sangh Parivar's Pamphlet. 1994.

[6] This is the title of a poem composed by Vajpayee at the time of India's independence. The poem was reproduced with some changes in 1997 on the occasion of *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra*. The *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* took place from May to July 1997 and took the BJP leader Advani from Mumbai to New Delhi

Indeed, the slogan *Akhand Bharat* plays on certain linguistic ambiguities as the term *akhand* also refers to the negation of partition which made Bharat *khandita*, or divided. According to Balraj Madhok Pakistan was carved out from within the "natural boundaries of India" [Madhok 1982:28]. The RSS describes partition in quasi Oedipal terms and equates it to a 'rape of the motherland' [Hansen 1999:112]. Although acknowledging that a unification of 'Greater India' is politically unviable, the Sangh Parivar pushes for a cultural unification through a voluntary merger of India's neighbouring countries.

In accordance with this strategy, *Akhand Bharat* extends beyond Burma and Afghanistan to include the countries of the Indian Diaspora. Given that the Sangh Parivar's definition of Indianness is not necessarily politically territorial and that Indianness is not dependent on country of origin but on some inherited cultural characteristics, it follows that Indians abroad remain Indians independently of birthplace or passport. For Savarkar, the "only geographical limits of Hindutva are the limits of our earth" [Savarkar, 1949:98] and those Hindus who reside abroad and even have a different citizenship, are still Hindus:

> "for the first essential of Hindutva is not that a man must not reside in lands outside India, but that wherever he or his descendants may happen to be he must recognize Sindhusthan as the land of his forefathers" [Savarkar, 1949:98].

The Sacred Land – Punyabhū

The concept of *Akhand Bharat* rests firmly on the principles of the sacrality and integrity of India's territory. Indeed, a prominent element in Savarkar's ideology regarding the Indian nation is the equivalence of *pitrbhū* (fatherland) with *punyabhū* (holyland). In his definition of Hinduism, or Hindu dharma as he calls it, he advances the notion that Hindu *dharma* is linked not only culturally but also *naturally* to the environment in which it developed. Using the metaphor of the river, Savarkar states:

> "As the Ganges, though flowing out of the lotus feet of Vishnu himself is even to the most orthodox devotes and mystic so far as human plane is concerned, the daughter of the Himalayas, even so, this land it the birth-place – the *matribhū* and *pitrbhū* – of that *tatvajnana* which in its religious aspect is signified as Hindu dharma" [Savarkar 1949:90].

Thus, he equates *pitrbhū* with *punyabhū*:

> "Hindu dharma of all shades and schools, lives and grows and has its being in the atmosphere of Hindu culture, and the dharma of a Hindu being so completely identified with the land of the Hindus, this land to him is not only a *pitrbhū* but a *punyabhū*, not only a fatherland but a holy land" [Savarkar 1949:91].

Savarkar's famous couplets: *Aasindhu sindhu-paryanta yasya bharat-bhuumika/ pitrbhumih pynyabhuscaiva sa vai hinduriti smrtah* ("A Hindu means a person who regards this Land of Bharat Varsha from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle land of his religion") beautifully encapsulate Hindutva's ideal coincidence of holyland with fatherland. In Savarkar's own words,

> "the Hindus, they being the people, whose past, present and future are most closely bound with the soil of Hindusthan as *pitrbhū* and *punyabhū*, they constitute the foundation, the bedrock, the reserved forces of the Indian state" [Savarkar, 1949:116].

The exceptionalism of Hindutva does not reside in the sacralisation of the land itself, as all patriae tend to be treated as sacred in nationalist discourse. In India, in the post-independence national imagination, the demarcation of the national borders and the consequent sacralisation of the national territory was founded on a particular nationalist mythology that portrayed India's secular, plural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and quasi-federal democracy as the containment and upholder of India's national territorial integrity [Singh 2001:139]. On the contrary, for Hindutva India's ascribed sacrality is religious cum political. India's representation as a sacred land is quintessentially Hindu. That is their innovation.

This is can be seen by the iconization of the geographical nation-space as both a Hindu goddess – *Bharat Mata* – and a living being. Within the Sangh Parivar symbolic repertoire the nation is frequently reduced to its archetypal image of *Bharat Mata*. Images of *Bharat Mata* often dominate the visual landscape during processions, political rallies, and other important Sangh Parivar's conventions. This gendered image

of India harks back to the nationalist movement. Previously[7] I had noted some of the peculiar features of India's representation as *Bharat Mata* and of its exceptional significance in the pre-independence iconography. *Bharat Mata*'s extraordinary appeal was based on its origins rooted in the religious and cultural traditions of India. While matriotism (the identification of the nation as a nurturing mother) is a feature common to nationalist movements, *Bharat Mata* expresses devotionalism steeped in Hindu traditions. *Bharat Mata* is not only an allegorical representation of the nation, but she is also a Hindu deity in her own right, with temples, prayers and rituals specially dedicated to her[8]. Iconographically *Bharat Mata* could be easily mistaken for any other Hindu goddess, being herself mostly fashioned after the goddesses Durga, Kali and Lakshmi. Picture 8 shows a typical picture of *Bharat Mata* emerging form the map of India. Here *Bharat Mata* resembles previous representations of the pre-independence nationalism in its iconographic traits [see Chapter 2]. However, there is a crucial difference. In order to identify the deity as Mother India and not as another Hindu deity, the iconography of *Bharat Mata* of the pre-independence period included some specific markers of identity. One was the Congress flag that she held usually in her left hand. Alternatively, she would be pictured flanked by the heroes, martyrs and leaders of the nationalist movement often portrayed paying homage to her or receiving her blessings. In the Sangh Parivar's iconography, *Bharat Mata* is usually depicted alone holding not the national flag but the *bhagwa dhwaj,* the saffron flag of the RSS or the trident (a symbol of the VHP) further signifying the Hindu character of India [Figs. 8 and 9].

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[7] See Chapter 2

[8] The proliferation of the *Bharat Mata* icon and the erection of temples dedicated to her are both signs of the institutionalisation of this particular deity in the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. There are three *Bharat Mata Mandir*: one in Benares built in 1936 by Shiv Prashad Gupt, one in Hardwar, that was built more recently in 1983 by Swami Satyamitranand Giri, a renouncer and activist of the VHP, and the third in Saket Nagar in Bhopal opened only in 2004. The *Bharat Mata Mandir* in Benares was inaugurated by none other than Mahatma Gandhi and it houses no image of any god or goddess but one of the most perfect relief maps of India carved out of marble. The *Bharat Mata Mandir* of Hardwar, a celebration of the Hindu nationalist view of Indian history, is built on seven floors, each one dedicated to different aspects of the Hindu nation.

Fig. 8 Bharat Mata

Fig. 9 Bharat Mata from *Bharat Ekatmata Stotra*

In addition to the motherland's personification with the image of *Bharat Mata*, its sacred geography is epitomised by the reverence to India's topographical features, based on Hindu traditions. This is *Sanatana Rashtra, Bharat Mata* in its most visible form where

> "every single mountain and river, big or small, named or unnamed, covering the body of *Bharat Mata*, has the imprint of divinity and history. Boundless myths and historical events woven around every one of them have become the woofs and warps of our one unifying National Consciousness"[9] [Seshadri preface to *Bharata Ekatmata Stotra* 1997:3, 4].

Significantly, the great mountain ranges, in particular the Himalayas and its peaks beside being the divine residence of Hindu gods and goddess are also symbolic paladins of Hindu integrity having protected India against the foreign aggressors [ibid:4]. India's great rivers – the Ganges, Yamuna, Narmada, Kaveri to name a few – all resonate with mythological associations and are sacred popular pilgrimage destinations. They are the *lok-matas* "the motherly streams nurturing and nourishing our people for countless generations" [ibid].

Hindu pilgrimage centres are physical associations to Hindu mythological history. They are *tirthas*, crossing places where "the gods have 'crossed down' into this world as *avataras*" and "where earthly pilgrims can make their spiritual crossings" [Eck 1998:65-66]. But it is also the entirety of India's land that is sacred for the Hindus. A popular pilgrimage sees the devotees circumambulate the entire country as they would for a temple, passing from the four *dhams* – where the divine is said to reside – at the four cardinal points at Badrinath, Puri, Rameshvaram, and Dvaraka. For Seshadri these hallowed pilgrimage centres are the symbols of:

> "the nation's psyche rich with the spirit of cultural and spiritual oneness ...Intertwined with all ancient myths and heroes and Avatars, they, in short, symbolise the unending flow of our national life since those hoary times".

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[9] Seshadri. Preface to *The Integral Spirit of Bharat* 1997:4

A prominent feature of imagining India as a sacred geography is Hindutva's use of a well-articulated riverine symbolism [Assayag 1998]. On the sacredness of Indian rivers, and of the Indus in particular, Savarkar was very vocal. In his seminal work *Hindutva. Who is a Hindu?* the Sindhu serves as the crucial parameter for defining Indianness. For Savarkar, the Sindhu not only provided the original inhabitants of the subcontinent with a name, but it also gave them a feeling of unity [Savarkar 1949:66]. Looking for a definition, an "essential meaning" of the word Hindu, Savarkar identified in the river Indus the symbolic heart of the Indian nation, "the cradle name of our nation" [ibid:12], "the vital spinal chord that connects the remotest past to the remotest future" [ibid:25]. He argued that indeed, the river, "welded them [the Aryans] into a nation and furnished the name which enabled their forefathers to voice forth their sense of national and cultural unity" [ibid:5]. For Savarkar, the Hindu was not just prosperous geographical features of India but, was also a visible symbol of nationality [ibid:6] a sign of demarcation, a border, with which to inscribe the Hindu nation [ibid:21].

The great procession for unity, the *Ekatmata Yatra*, elaborated on this riverine symbolism to illustrate Hindutva's attempt at evoking India's unity through the mobilisation of its sacred geography. It also illustrates how the Sangh Parivar successfully managed to represent the elusive concept of *Akhand Bharat*. Indeed, given the imaginary character of *Akhand Bharat*, the latter cannot be seen and experienced but through those ritual actions and public processions organised regularly by the Sangh Parivar. I have already noted how public rituals in their dramatisation of power and power relations are excellent sites for the corroboration and legitimation of a group's social values[10]. The Hindutva alliance through a series of *jagaran* – awakenings – arouses Hindu militancy, identity and awareness, usually by way of spectacular activities such as processions, festivals, and rituals (e.g., *yatras* and *yagnas*) that have characterised the recent history of India and that have carried the Hindutva message across India, in every town and village. Indeed, the promotion of this programme of socio-cultural reforms and ethno-religious mobilising campaigns has become an

[10] See Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

integral aspect of Hindutva's strategy. Besides being vehicles for mobilisation, these processions have also promoted and popularised the image of India as *Akhand Bharat*. For example, the *Ekatmata Yatra*, launched in 1983 by the VHP[11], celebrated and symbolised the subcontinent's cultural and geographical unity, its sacredness and most importantly its Hindu character. For this sacrifice, three great processions were meant to crisscross India from north to south and east to west[12], converging at Nagpur, the geographical centre of India. In addition, several other[13] small processions lasting five days each were meant to join the main processions. The processions touched a host of sacred sites, all Hindu holy places, pilgrimage centres or "traumatic places" of inflicted humiliation [Assayag 1998:141]. During this *yatra* water from the river Ganges was carried in procession in huge receptacles while small vessels carrying the sacred water were sold along the way. Water from India's others main sacred rivers was also taken in the procession and mixed with the water from the Ganges. This intermingling of waters from India's numerous sacred sources with waters coming from other neighbouring countries was supposed to symbolise unity and to reflect Hindus' view of India as a sacred land:

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[11] The *Ekatmata Yatra* was only one (and possibly the largest and most popular) of the many events launched by the Sangh Parivar in response to a mass conversion to Islam in 1981 of 1,000 members of the Scheduled Castes in the southern village of Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu. In the following months, many more Dalits converted to Islam in South India. These mass conversions triggered a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability among the Hindus, to which the Sangh Parivar reacted by organising a large number of events for *Jana Jagaran* (People's Awakening), the first one of which took place less than seven months after the mass conversion in Meenakshipuram. The VHP launched two *jnana rathams* (chariots of religious wisdom) in which statues of the local Tamil deity Murugam were taken in procession across the state of Tamil Nadu [Bhatt 2001:188]. As part of the programme of the *Hindu Samajutsav* (Hindu Solidarity Conference), the religious authorities participating (among which the *Swamis* of Madurai, Tanjore, Madras and Vishvesh Tirth) appealed for an end of practices of untouchability. There, the next day, religious leaders organised a Vedic sacrifice – *homa* – open to all castes and a *bhojanam* a collective meal, where they shared food with local Dalits [Seshadri 1984].

[12] The first procession started in Kathmandu in Nepal and it ended in Rameshwaram, in Tamil Nadu; the second one travelled from Gangasagar in West Bengal to Somnath in Gujarat; the third Yatra winded its way down across the subcontinent from Hardwar in Uttar Pradesh to Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. Sixty-nine other small processions setting off from several other sites in the interiors joined in.

[13] The number of these processions varies. According to Assayag [1998:335] they were 47; but Jaffrelot sustains that they were 69 [Jaffrelot 1993:360]. However, it seems to Har Mohan Lal [*Organiser* 12 Feb. 1984:6, in Jaffrelot 1993:361], a total number of 312 *yatras* took place.

> "When the *yatras* reach their destination at Rameshwaram and Somnath, the *khumba* (jars) will contain water from all the sacred places, namely the four *Dhams*, (the most revered places of pilgrimage being Badrinath, Puri, Rameshwaram and Dwarka), the twelve *Jyotirlinga* (natural stalagmites considered as *lingams* of Shiva) ... and hundreds of sacred rivers, lakes and wells" [*Organiser* 23 October 1983:15 in Jaffrelot: 360].

As Assayag ingeniously puts it:

> "It was as if, by following traditional pilgrimage routes which linked the main religious centres, the processional routes merged in the holy streams of the Mother so as to evoke the geographical unity of India (*Bhāratvarşa*) understood as an ancient sacred land (*ksetra*), redrawn today by the martial stride of modern Hindu crusaders." [Assayag 1998:135]

That rivers constitute a potent symbolic weapon in the Sangh Parivar ideological armoury, is further demonstrated by the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan*, a festival launched to celebrate the river Indus (here called with its Sanskrit name *Sindhu*). This festival is a newly invented ritual, celebrated since 1997, that sprang from an initiative of the BJP leader Advani during a BJP electoral campaign visit to Leh in Ladakh. Celebrating the importance and divinity of the river Indus in India's civilization, this ceremony has taken place every year near Leh. The festival is a three-day affair that culminates with ritual Buddhist prayers followed by a series of Vedic rites held on the banks of the river, a *Sindhu Puja*, and a host of cultural programmes. Being a cross between a pilgrimage and a cultural festival, with its range of cultural performances from different parts of the country, the festival is also reminiscent of the Republic Day parade. Attended by prominent leaders[14] the ceremony seeks "to strengthen the spirit of national integration", through the symbolic use of the river Indus as an emblem of

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[14] During the years, the celebrity list has included, besides BJP leaders and prominent government personalities such as L K Advani and A B Vajpayee, several ministers of the BJP-led NDA government, (the Minister of Defence, the Union Minister for Tourism, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting), regional and local government functionaries (most prominent of which was the participation of Farooq Abdullah), and, most notably, a large number of RSS and Sangh Parivar officials such as Malkani, and the editor of the RSS mouthpiece *Panchjanya*, Tarun Vijay. Numerous spiritual leaders were also invited to the festivals. In 2003 these included: Sri Shankaracharyaji Swami Jayendra Saraswatiji, Kanchi Kaam Koti, Sri Shankaracharyaji Swami Divyanand Teerthji, Bhanpura Peeth, Swami Avdeshanandji, Swami Chinmayanandji, Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji (Pujya Muniji), Sant Rameshbhai Oza (Pujya Bhaishri), Roopchandra Muniji, the Archbishop of Delhi, the Archbishop of Agra, and many other leaders of different traditions.http://www.sindhudarshanindia.com/000news82003.htm Accessed on 2 December 2003

national unity and identity. In the official literature on the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* the river – "symbol of strength" – is made to stand for "peaceful coexistence and communal harmony" and national integration. It is a symbol of India's civilizational heritage, of "the permanence and power of the ancient Indian civilization", "cradle of Indian civilization"[15], and the source of India's name. The symbolic potential of the Indus is not self-evident. As the editor of *Panchjanya* – Tarun Vijay – took pains to note, the Indian population neglected this river for years. The Sindhu was so neglected as a symbol of Indian nationhood that the realisation that the river also flows in Indian territory is hailed as a discovery by Advani himself. The river runs mostly in Pakistan and, for modern day Indians, the Indus does not entail any strong emotional attachment, as opposed to the river Ganges which is central to the ritual life of the whole Hindu community[16].

The significance the Sangh Parivar attributed to the river Indus in the imagination of the Indian nation depends on the river's symbolic potential. First and foremost, it is a reflection of the pre-eminence given to the geographical and physical features of India in Hindutva's literature and thought. I commented earlier on the importance attributed to it by Savarkar. Indeed, for him the geographical characteristic of India and in particular the river Sindhu, besides representing the cradle of Hindu civilization, must be the "first essential of Hindutva" [Savarkar 1949:66]. That the importance of the Indus river as a symbol of unity and civilization rests mostly on Savarkar's Hindutva is very telling, when we consider that the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was promoted as a national ceremony since its establishment. Indeed, in inventing this ritual the Sangh Parivar not only promoted one of its symbols and, by way of it, its ideology; but by doing so it also contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between Indian/Hindu, national/communal. It was a clear case of image *transference*. Despite being promoted as one, the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* is not a national official ceremony.

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[15] All these quotes are from: *Evolution of a New Pilgrimage of National Integration* [1997] from one of the RSS-related websites, http://delhi.vsnl.net.in/sindhu/sindhu.html. Accessed 2 December 2003.

[16] In order to remedy to this lack of affective attachment to the symbol of the Indus river, in 2003 a touring photographic exhibition of the *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* was organised by Tarun Vijay under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. http://www.sindhudarshanindia.com/000news92003.htm Accessed 12 January 2004.

The festival was advanced initially by the then BJP-led Delhi State Government with the participation of Arunchal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir Governments. Nevertheless, it remains a party affair with the trappings of a national one. This dissimulation was evident in 1997 when the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was hyped as part of the celebrations marking the fifty years of India independence. Indeed, the official celebration logo was reproduced on all the publicity posters, banners, and leaflets to promote the erroneous impression that the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was part of the national celebrations calendar. This equivalence was furthermore strengthened by the presence on the stage of the "50 Years" celebrations logo which was reproduced side by side the BJP party symbol and flags[17]. This blurring of boundaries between national and communal, governmental and partisan, was also evident during the celebration held in 1999, when the ceremony became a stage for the promotion of patriotic feelings. In that year, the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was celebrated in late July, when the proxy war between India and Pakistan in the Himalayan district of Kargil – only 230 Km away from Leh – was still raging.

Indeed, another important symbolic aspect of the Indus is its location. Although born in Pakistan, the river runs briefly in India in the contested state of Jammu and Kashmir. During the celebrations the organisers of the festival seized the opportunity to make the occasion a celebration of patriotic sentiments and that year the focus was to remember the martyrs of Kargil rather than a cultural extravaganza[18]. Since then, the importance of the *Sindhu Darshan* festival, resides not simply in its cultural potential but also in its patriotic significance. Thus the festival has since become "a symbolic salute to the brave soldier of India", the "karamboomi of India's war warriors" who wrote history with "their blood on high mountain snow clad peaks making the nation proud"[19]. During the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* of 1999, the Sangh Parivar created images

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[17] The case of *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* was not an isolated occurrence. In 1997, in parallel with the official calendar of celebrations organised by the central government mainly under the directives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the BJP organised a host of public functions and often the official celebration logo was replicated on their promotional material. See for instance the literature published by the BJP for the *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra*. The cover of both the booklet and the video produced for the occasion bore the official celebration logo.

[18] *Advani to go on pilgrimage to J&K*. Ajay Suri. *Indian Express*. 27 July 1999

[19] *Daily Excelsior* 6 June 2000.

and rituals that blurred the distinction between patriotism and militarism, thus reinforcing Hindutva's master narrative of a resurgent militant Hindu nation. Entire battalions of the Indian Army and the Indian Tibetan Border People provided logistical and material support to the festival, thus creating "an event in which Hindu rituals mingled with military salutes and military men were made to become the masters of ceremony."[20] The 1999 *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was but one of the activities organised by the Sangh Parivar to whip up the already heightened nationalist sentiments[21]. Thus, not only did a party celebration of a brand of cultural nationalism became a celebration of military victory and prowess, but the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* was also made to look like a national celebration.

And finally, all the symbolic practices centred on the celebration of the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* are also a Sangh Parivar attempt to re-appropriate one of the most potent symbols of India civilization and ancient history. In the official literature of the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* the river Indus is often associated with the Indus Valley civilization. However, since the partition with Pakistan, India lost the archaeological sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Deprived of its most crucial symbols of Hindutva, given also that after partition most of the river's flow is now in Pakistan, the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* has since became a substitute symbol of national identity and patriotism[22].

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[20] From *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* old official website: http://delhi.vsnl.net.in/sindhu/tv-leh.htm 2 April 2000.

[21] During the most acute stages of the conflict, the country showed great patriotism that found expression in many different forms. During the Kargil conflict, "[P]ublic funerals of dead soldiers with the entire civilian public administration in attendance were stage managed to create an appropriate stage for the RSS and the BJP functionaries to act out their parts of the guardians of guardians and of India". In general, the press was overwhelmed by tributes to the martyrs of Kargil. Every magazines and newspaper had articles about the medals and honours conferred to the dead, about the compensation granted to the families by the government, about the injured and their families. The 'blood spilled on the altar of patriotism' became the dominant theme. In this climate of raised nationalism instances of the Sangh Parivar's promotion of patriotism abounded. On one occasion, RSS and VHP functionaries visited injured and convalescing soldiers, and presented them copies of the Ramayana, while on another they offered them 20.000 rakhis "smoothly carried to the Military Intelligence office for the soldiers- on both occasions with press cameramen in tow." [ibid].

[22] In Hindutva's literature the Indus Civilization is often referred to as Saraswati Civilization to reclaim its origins in India rather than in an area that now lies in Pakistan.

Besides being a vehicle for the promotion of Hindutva ideology, of patriotism and of national pride, the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* is also a newly invented ritual. It is a cross between a pilgrimage and a cultural performance and incorporates elements derived from different ritual sources in a novel format. The function is jointly conducted by the Ladakh Buddhist Association, Shia Majlis, Sunni Anjuman, Christian Moravian Church, Hindu Trust and Sikh Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee. The ritual programme includes Buddhist prayers led by the most revered Lamas of the region held on the banks of the river, followed by a Vedic ceremony, a *puja* and ritual bathing of direct Hindu inspiration. Reminiscent of other rituals organised by the Sangh Parivar, the ceremony involves the mixing of the waters of different rivers[23].

The novelty of the *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* is both literal and figurative. Established in 1997, the festival entailed the acquisition of a new sacred icon, that of *Sindhu Mata*, in the Sangh Parivar pantheon. Uncontroversial like *Gaumata* and *Bharat Mata*, it can be revered by all Hindus irrespective of their caste or sect. Thus, this highly symbolic performance, despite claiming to be "a truly National Integration Programme", remains decidedly Hindu[24]. The Indus has since become a potent symbol of nationhood, patriotism, and Hindu civilization and culture. It is a symbol of both identity, because it is India's eponym – following Savarkar's thought – and nationhood, because it flows through the contested territory of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition it acts as a symbol of national integration by being co-opted in the ritual practices the Buddhist communities and Scheduled Caste and Tribes of Ladakh. In this operation the Sangh Parivar becomes the promoter of patriotism and nationalism while propogating its own brand of nationalist symbols, which it naturalises as Indian[25].

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[23] In 2003 Advani poured the waters of the Brahmaputra into the Indus. [http://www.sindhudarshanindia.com/000news22003.htm] Accessed 28 September 2003.

[24] In this context, even the use of a Sanskritzed terminology is significant. The use of Sindhu instead of Indus is typical example of the Sangh Parivar's idiomatic language. On one hand, it denotes the Parivar's predilection of Sanskrit terms in its efforts to signify – also with language – India's cultural heritage. By using Sanskrit, the Sangh Parivar is claiming that India's culture is mainly Vedic/Hindu, while denying at the same time Islamic influences. On the other hand, Sindhu is reminiscent of Savarkar's famous Sanskrit couplets "*asindhu sindhu...*".

[25] Given that the *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* festival is an initiative of one particular party in India – albeit the party that for some time led the government at the centre – it is quite a surprise to see that even after the defeat of the NDA at the 2004 General Election, the *Sindhu Darśan Abhiyan* is

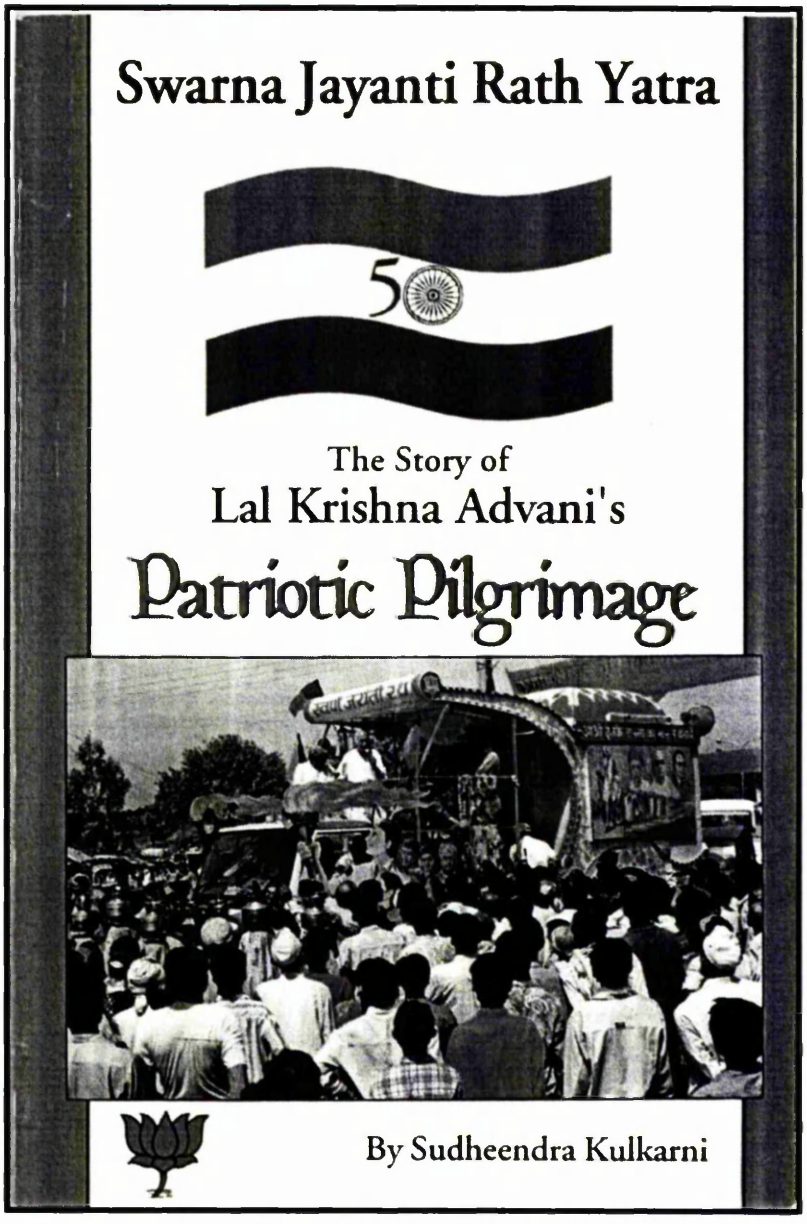

Fig. 10 Cover of *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* Booklet

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still performed under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Thus, the translation from a ceremony of one party to a celebration of national importance is this way fully accomplished. It is however interesting to note that the India's Minister of Tourism, Renuka Chowdhuri announced that the River Sindhu flowing in Ladakh should be known as River Singhe. Her contention is that the local Buddhist name of the Sindhu River is Singhe River and the River is known as Sindhu River "only in Pakistan". The Minister has, therefore, removed the word Sindhu from the *Sindhu Darshan* program and renamed it as *Singhe Darshan*.

The Sangh Parivar draws upon religious resources, traditions and customs as mobilising tools at the service of Hindu nationalism. *Bharat*, imagined as the outline of the Indian subcontinent with its fuzzy, unclear borders extending, but not merging, with the Asian continent, is a Hinduised landscape, homogeneous in its character, despite its variety – as epitomised by the numerous sacred sites devoted to the Hindu religion. Moreover, the representation of the nation as *Bharat Mata*, not only identifies the nation as a legitimate goddess of the Hindu pantheon, but, by representing India in an anthropomorphic form, also inscribes the land within the Hindu tradition of seeing, for the nation in India must not only be imagined but also *darśan-ed* [Chakrabharty 1999:204]. The *Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan* is doing just that.

Hindu Rashtra (on the nature of the Indian State)

In the previous section I argued that the Sangh Parivar imagines India as a territory inscribed into a sacred geography, which is inhabited by a homogeneous Hindu community upon whose traditions India's cultural make-up is formed. Now I will consider how the Sangh Parivar perceives the Indian nation-state and how this is symbolically represented. For the Sangh Parivar, the concept of *Hindu Rashtra* provides the guiding principles for the ideal nation-state. On the content of *Hindu Rashtra*, which is not a political philosophy but an ideal model of political administration, the Sangh Parivar is quite vague. Indeed, this *Hindu Rashtra* is not a "theocratic concept but is cultural in content" [Malik and Singh 1992:14], thereby providing the moral justification for the state's forays into questions of cultural policy, as demonstrated by the recent controversies regarding the Sanskritization of Indian culture. The ideal nation-state also rests on issues of majoritarianism and organicity, which the Sangh Parivar communicates by employing the symbolic of the imagery of the *virat-purusha* and by articulating the concept of the organic and interdependent nature of Indian society.

Despite stressing the geographical unity of the Indian nation, the Sangh Parivar's ideologues are against a civic and territorial model of nationalism; they reject "any form of nation state based on an abstract social contract and thereby comprising individualised citizens dwelling within the country's administrative frontiers"

[Jaffrelot 1993:28]. Golwalkar was adamantly opposed to the idea propagated by Congress that the nation "is composed of all those who, for one reason or the other happen to live at the time in the country" [Golwalkar 1939:59]. Inspired by the German writer Bluntschli's criticism of the notion of social contract, Golwalkar's ethnic nationalism provided a definition of the Indian nation that rested firmly on the concept of race and culture. Taking as a model Germany under Nazism, Golwalkar considered the *Hindu Rashtra* to be in opposition to the idea of composite nationalism. In this sense, Hindu becomes a marker of identity always opposed to other religious markers, such as Muslim and Christian. Thus Golwalkar identifies Hindu, which for Savarkar did not necessarily refer to religious identity – albeit being equally exclusivist – with Hinduism.

This ideology that identifies in the Hindu community India's original and genuine inhabitants, supports the understanding of democracy as majority rule. A notion of *majoritarianism* thus permeates Hindutva ideology. *Majoritarianism* means the predominance of the culture of the majority, which by extension becomes *national.* Indeed, in the Sangh Parivar parlance, the adjective Hindu, *rashtriya* (national) and *bharatiya* (Indian) are interchangeable [Jaffrelot 1993], thereby equating the Indian nation-state and Hinduism and supporting the notion that Hinduism is the essential element of Indian nationhood. On *majoritarianism* – or why the Hindus should rule India – Savarkar claimed that Hindutva provides the essentials of nationality on which to build India [Savarkar 1949:114] and that the foundations of the nation rest on:

> "that portion of its citizens whose interests and history and aspirations are most closely bound up with the land and who thus provide the real foundation to the structure of their national state ... [T]he Hindus, they being the people, whose past, present and future are most closely bound with the soil of Hindusthan as *pitrbhū* and *punyabhū*, they constitute the foundation, the bedrock, the reserved forces of the Indian state" [ibid:115,116].

These concepts were recast into the metaphor of the divine *purusha,* or primordial man – a popular theme in classical Hinduism, originating from the *RgVeda,* the oldest Hindu sacred text. It depicts human society and its four divisions (the *varna* system) as evolving from the primordial man, with each division corresponding to a

body part (head, arms, thighs and feet)[26]. This metaphor was persuasive in a nationalist context because it conveyed the image of an organic and interdependent social system. Rejecting, like Savarkar and Golwalkar did, but inspired by the notions of the divine *purusha* and of the social contract, Upadhyaya – another Hindutva ideologue, framer of the RSS's constitution and founder of the Jana Sangh – considers the Indian community as 'self-born' and as an 'organic entity' [Upadhyaya 1965:32]. He employed the framework of the *varna* system not to advocate the restoration of this social system (itself resisted by the RSS, who considered it resistant to the creation of a homogenous Hindu community), but to project the idea that the roots of contemporary Indian society are to be found in an integrated, harmonious, ideal and organic society:

> "In our concept of four castes, they are thought of four castes, they are thought of as analogous to the different limbs of Virat-Purusha. [...] These limbs are not only complementary to one another, but even further, there is individuality, unity. There is a complete identity of interest, identity of belonging. [...] If this idea is not kept alive, the castes instead of being complementary, can produce conflict. But then this is distortion. [...] This is indeed the present condition of our society". [Upadhyaya 1979:41].

Despite situating the individual as the basic unit of the social body, the organic society portrayed by the primordial man symbolism strongly denies individuality and emphasizes the interdependence of all society's members. In the ideal state, everybody recognizes their oneness with the others in a spirit of sacrifice and cooperation. Thus, this metaphor signifies social unity, interdependence, and solidarity; however, it also exposes the Sangh Parivar's belief in an ordered, hierarchical society. It is the organicity of society that is most forcefully implied by the employment of the imagery of the *virat-purusha*. By articulating concepts of mutual complementarity and unity, the implication entailed by the imagery of the *virat-purusha* is that conflict among the various limbs of the nation – its various institutions: castes, family, community, trade unions, gram panchayat, janapada and the state [Upadhyaya 1979:41-42] – is a distortion. Indeed, in the same way that there cannot arise any conflict among the

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[26] The principle of hierarchy is directly implied by this myth of origin of all men form the sacrifice by the gods of the primordial cosmic being, *Purusha*. According to the hymn of *Rg Veda* 10.90 that celebrates this sacrifice, the different *varnas* are born out his different limbs of the primordial *purusha*: the Brahmins from the head, the kshatriyas from his arms, the vaisyas from his torso and the shudras from his feet.

head, arms, torso and feet of the same body for the body to function and survive, then there must be complete identity of interest and of belonging for the Hindu society to flourish.

Certainly the Sangh Parivar's recourse to the metaphor of the *virat-purusha* betrays an inclination for a highly hierarchised society where *dharma* (considered as one's social, religious and economic duties) plays a vital regulatory role in maintaining order and where the individual must learn to merge his/her identity to that of the community [Basu et al. 1993:78]. Indeed, for Golwalkar the state was a superfluous structure that could be superseded. The Sangh Parivar aspires to realize that goal:

> "The ultimate vision of our work, which has been the living inspiration for all our organisational efforts, is a perfectly organised state of our society wherein each individual has been moulded into a model of ideal Hindu manhood and made into a living limb of the corporate personality of society" [Golwalkar, 1966:61].

Who's an Indian?

> "I am confident that India will enter the next millennium with its head held high, a strong and prosperous nation, proud of its past and confident of its future as a leading member of the comity of nations."
> [Vajpayee, 1997]

For Hindutva, India is a sacred land, whose borders do not coincide with the (arbitrary) administrative frontiers of the modern nation-state. The boundaries are unstable and correspond to Hinduism's expansion in the subcontinent and beyond. Based on Hindu sacred tradition, which associated India's landscape with divinities and mythological traditions, Basu et al. [1993:76] described this process as a "hinduization of [India]'s geographical, historical, even zoological features." Similarly, for the Sangh Parivar, an Indian is not someone born within the geopolitical borders, or possessing an Indian passport but one who fully satisfies Hindutva's prerequisites of belonging. During the Nehru period paradigmatic Indian citizens were simply characterised by the trope of modernity and their representations were bereft of any uniform cultural markers. On the contrary, for the Sangh Parivar national identity is culturally defined and this identity rests firmly on Hindu traditions. The Hindu

nationalists' India is populated by figures that epitomise Hindutva's ideals. Thus, the typical Indian is a personification of the Hindu ethos. The national citizen is a *natural born Indian*[27], modern yet traditional ("modern in outlook, with a sound understanding of global developments and technological trends and the way they impact on India, and yet is proudly anchored in India's value systems and cultural traditions"[28]), tolerant, peaceful and animated by a spirit of self-sacrifice and cooperation (because Hinduism is so), yet strong and proud of his/her national heritage.

Hindutva's homogeneous Indian identity is represented through symbols derived from Hindu way of life: language, social customs, religious rituals, and cultural traditions. Concepts of pride and strength have also become important symbols of identity with the the construct of the proud Indian emerging at the expense of other identities. National identity symbols were employed in a variety of ways and media. As noted earlier, public rituals and processions (e.g., official national ceremonies and various consciousness-arising [*jagaran*] processions organised by the Sangh Parivar's affiliates) were prominent vehicles for parading symbols. Elections were peak periods for waging symbolic wars and offered an opportunity to articulate images of Indianness.

Two operations have characterised the Sangh Parivar's fundamentals of national belonging. The first one establishes the equivalence of Indianness with Hinduness by employing cultural symbols of national belonging. In this operation the focus stressed the Hindu character of the Indian identity, by establishing the ethno-cultural core of Indianness. The search for a common denominator of Indianness – through the mobilisation of symbols such as the cow, the river Ganges, the Hindu god Ram; the attempt to impose the singing of the hymn *Vande Mataram*, the promotion of the founding narrative/myths of origin and ancestry, and of traditions pertaining solely the Hindu/Indian way of life – all characterise the demarcation of Indian identity in strictly cultural-ethno-religious terms. The second operation focussed on the

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[27] This neologism was widely used during the 1999 general election. See below.

[28] Bharatiya Janata Party, *Delhi Pledge* – Adopted at the National Council meeting of the BJP at New Delhi on August 3, 2002

articulation of the attributed characteristics of Hindu/Indian identity. Concepts of strength, tolerance, pride, masculinity were articulated through the symbols of the nuclear bomb, through rituals – such as the event *Satyamev Jayate* and the 1999 Republic Day parade where the symbols of modern warfare were given ample space. Needless to say, the promotion of Hindu origin myths, of memories of a distinct Hindu society, and of traditions pertaining solely to Hindu life, ignored India's diverse cultural heritage and denied almost seven centuries of Islamic and British domination in India. Although at times these two operations overlap, I shall approach them separately.

The Ethno-cultural core of national belonging

For the Sangh Parivar, Hindutva's essentials are a common nation, a common race and a common civilisation (*ek rashtra, ek jati, ek sanskriti*). This mono-cultural definition of Indianness presupposes that it was Hinduism – the basic fabric of India – that shaped the nation and resisted the assault of heterogeneous cultural systems. In this process, culture (*samskriti*) and the coincidence of *pitrbhū* with the *punyabhū* are necessary to the construction of an exclusivist Indian identity (see above). Maps of India as *Akhand Bharat* – whereby the geographical landscape coincides with a religiously demarcated space – and representations of India as *Bharat Mata* – the mother land – visually identify India with Hindu traditions. However, the coincidence of the sacred land with patria does not alone form the bedrock of Indian identity. Because Hindutva nationalism prioritizes culture over politics, cultural traits and practices (rewriting history, transforming Hindu religious celebrations into national traditions) define identity. Because for Hindutva, culture is but a by-product of Hindu dharma [Panikkar 2004.], it identifies national culture with Hindu religious culture.

Despite the Sangh Parivar's attempts to minimize religious connotations by equating Hindu to Bharatiya (i.e., Indian), the symbols of national identity reference Hindus' religious traits (e.g., *Bharat Mata, Ganga Mata, Gomata,* and Ram). These Hindu rituals and traditions assume such stature in determining social identity that, for example, Sonia Gandhi's failure to read Hindi in the *devanagari* script became symptomatic of her foreignness. Moreover, these symbols could both unite Hindus,

without distinction to caste or sect, and exclude non-Hindu communities. Similarly, for Golwalkar, respect for the cow represented the common denominator for Indian unity [Basu et al. 1993:76], which for Seshadri, is symbolised by a series of practices that are "marks of orthodox Hindu piety" [ibid].

The metaphor of the "natural born Indian" [29] conveyed similar concepts. Articulating notions of primordial attachments to the Indian soil, the term acquired currency in 1999, during the XIII Lok Sabha and was primarily used by those detractors of Sonia Gandhi who opposed her candidature as Prime Minister of India[30]. According to an editorial published in the *Organiser* a "natural born Indian" is "... one who is born in a country and is heir to its history, ethos and culture." Thus political allegiance for a "natural born Indian" is "a natural part of his personality" because he or she has a natural attachment to a place where he [sic] belongs"[31]. During the 1999 general elections, the BJP's official electoral campaign partly replicated these arguments [Fig.11].

Fortuitously for the Sangh Parivar, the term 'natural born Indian' could convey notions of attachment to the soil that were central to Hindutva's definition of Indianness. Moreover, the term implicated into the Hindu/Indian fold strategies of inclusions that were also relevant to identity questions of the NRIs – Non-Resident Indians – and of the PIOs – Persons of Indian Origins. Since for the Sangh Parivar

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[29]The Indian Constitution does not distinguish the rights of citizens on the basis of how they acquired citizenship, be it by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation or incorporation of the territory. Therefore, the term 'natural born Indian' is not used by the Indian Constitution. The inclusive concept of Indian identity embraced by the Indian Constitution is based on the pluralistic traditions that became dominant in the nationalist movement and at the time of independence. The framers of the Indian Constitution made non-discrimination the basis of tolerance in independent India in order to dismantle the system of discrimination of the caste-system and pre-empty the risk of religion discrimination after the atrocious events that accompanied the partition of the British Raj in India and Pakistan. This term is used in the American Constitution (sec 1 Clause 5): "No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States".

[30] For an analysis of the phenomenon, see Vittorini [2003].

[31] *Organiser* 8 August 1999.

Indianness is not civic, but instead depends on both inherited cultural characteristics and the coincidence of *Punyabhū* with *Patribhū* – a mix of racial and cultural theories of national identity – according to the Hindutva forces Indians abroad remain Indians independently of where they are born or the passport they carry. In this sense, nationality is culturally based and genetically/genealogically transmitted. According to some, this strategy of inclusion serves to disseminate Hinduism by internationalizing it and to strengthen the cultural concept of identity. Not surprisingly, the Indian government under the leadership of the BJP launched a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening the ties of the NRIs and PIOs with India and furthering their inclusion into the homogeneous Hindu nation[32] .

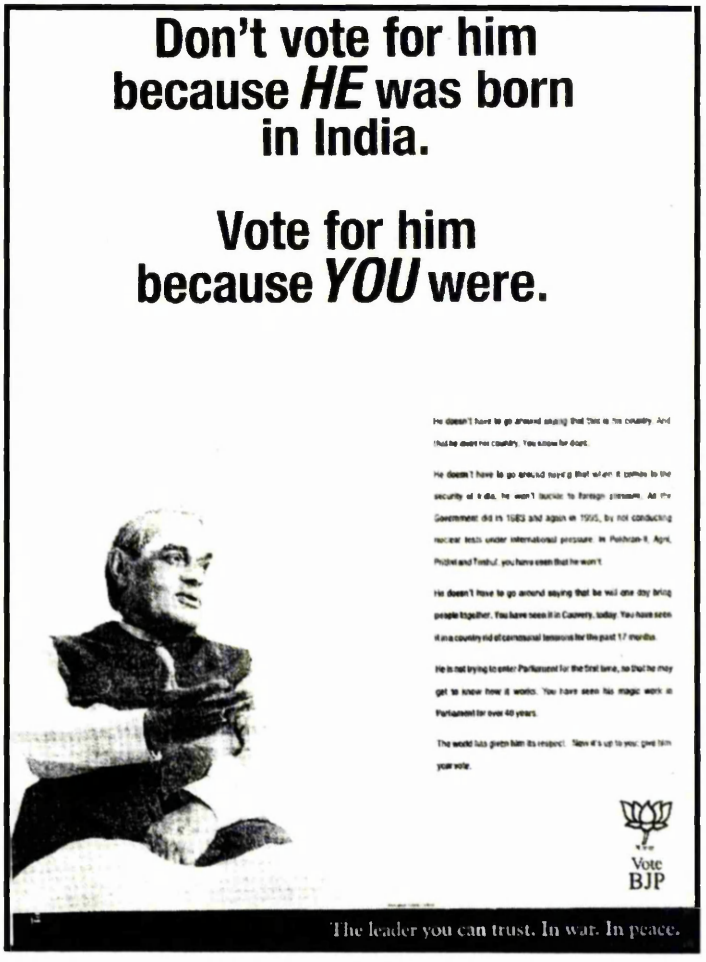

Fig.11 BJP Poster – 1999 Election Campaign

[32] Among the many initiatives launched by the Sangh Parivar, the three-day *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conference* organised by the BJP-led NDA Government in recognition and appreciation of the role of the Indian diaspora, while calling upon furthering their links with the motherland, deserves mention. During the same legislature, the NDA Government floated a special bond for NRIs, aptly called Resurgent India Bonds, in order to raise $2 billion. The government successfully raised $4.2bn from expatriate Indians [Arulanantham 2004:13]

In this strategy of inclusion and exclusion from the Indian/Hindu identity, the process of othering – the way in which otherness is constructed – is crucial to the formation of identities. Savarkar himself was aware of it [Savarkar1949: 32]. While Hindutva narratives of identity produce cultural and political unity (here heterogeneity is glossed over to reinforce an idea of unitary identity), they also work as practices of exclusions. While India's depressed castes and tribes, as well as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are all believed to be part of the homogenous Hindu fold, the others, variously represented as either the Muslim or the Christians, are excluded from the Sangh Parivar's model of national identity. They cannot be considered Hindus and therefore part of the Hindu nation, because as Savarkar explains, even

> "in the case of some of our Mohamedan [sic] or Christian countrymen who [...] have inherited a common Father-land and greater part of the wealth of common culture – language, law, customs, folklore and history" they "cannot be recognized as Hindus. For though Hindusthan to them is *pitrbhū* as to any other Hindu yet is not to them a *punyabhū* too. Their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil." [Savarkar 1949:92].

Thus, against these stereotypical images of Hindu identity there emerge stereotypical representations of the Muslims. The dominant representations of the Muslim community in India tend to produce a masculinised imagery, which is complementary to traditional feminine representations of the nation (centred on the paradigm of *Bharat Mata*). Muslims are typically depicted as very fertile and prolific. Inherent to this representation is also a discourse of Hindutva's insecurity, which is evidenced by the anxiety that the Muslim population will surpass the Hindu community in a not so distant future. The latest census confirmed this demographic trend thereby accentuating Hindutva's concern. Issues of fertility obviously reproduce also images of virility. In their virility, Muslims are primarily seen as lustful and therefore a constant danger for virtuous Hindu girls and women. Muslims are also represented as backward, barbaric religious fanatics whose faith is usually considered rigid and non-tolerant. Repeatedly these images were reproduced in Hindutva's literature and rhetoric.

During the 1999 electoral campaign the slogan *"videshi-swadeshi"*, which articulated strategies of inclusion and exclusion, gained popularity. It was Sushma Swaraj – one of the BJP's most prominent leaders – that coined the famous was cry: *"svadeshi naarige puraskara, videshi naarige tiraskara"* ("reward the *svadeshi* woman, reject the *videshi* one"). Obviously, Sushma Swaraj sought to turn the Lok Sabha contest into a fight between a native (*swadeshi*) and a foreigner (*videshi*) and filed her nomination from Bellary, Sonia Gandhi's same constituency. This dichotomy was even represented in dramatic form when Sushma Swaraj appeared on the political stage dressed as the paradigmatic Indian woman, thus symbolically epitomising Indian identity. She was draped in the BJP's colours – a green blouse and a bright orange sari – complete with bright *bindi* and *sindoor*, bangles and *mangalsutra*. She was the dramatic and living enactment of the BJP's own version of the ideal Indian woman, theatrically posing as a housewife and *behan*[33].

Since culture is the primary ideological plank for the promotion of this type of Hindu culture, the Sangh Parivar sought to control India's major cultural institutions. According to Panikkar [2003], Hindutva's cultural project is encapsulated in the slogan 'nationalise and spiritualise' and part of its aim is to "retrieve and disseminate the cultural traditions of the 'golden' Hindu past" [ibid]. The promotion of Hindu culture, way of life and myths of origins becomes central to the Hindutva's brand of nationalism of 'one culture, one country, one nation' and its definition of national identity. Both the 1996 and 1998 BJP election manifestoes openly declared the party's intention to colonise India's cultural sphere. While in 1996 the manifesto identified in Hindutva – there aptly defined as cultural nationalism –the driving force that "will bridge our present to our glorious past and pave the way for an equally glorious future", in 1998 the manifesto declared the primacy of culture over policy by claiming that the BJP's nationalist view was not "merely bound by the geographical or political

[33] Interestingly, both Sonia Gandhi and Sushma Swaraj invoked family-related markers of identity. If Sonia Gandhi defended her Indianness by portraying herself as the official *bahu* (daughter-in-law) of India, Sushma Swaraj played with the image of the housewife and the *behan* (sister) [Vittorini 2002].

identity of Bharat but it is referred by our timeless cultural heritage [...] a civilisational identity" [Noorani 2004]. During the five years of BJP government at the centre, the Ministries of Education, Information and Broadcasting, Culture and Human Resource Development were all under its firm control, while Vajpayee and Advani were in full control of the state apparatus – essential for the implementation of the agenda of cultural nationalism. Moreover, the Vajpayee government appointed RSS stalwarts in high offices (such as Sunder Singh Bhandari, Vishnu Kant Shastri, Bhai Mahavir, K. R. Malkani and Suraj Bhan as State Governors, and Bhairon Singh Shekhwat as Vice-President) who exercised great influence and informal powers.

A vivid example of the Sangh Parivar's interventionism in cultural policy occurred at the Education Ministers' Conference held in Delhi on 22-24 October 1998, when the then Human Resource Development Minister – Murli Manohar Joshi – submitted a set of controversial proposals to "Indianise, nationalise and spiritualise education"[34]. To the conference's official agenda Murli Manohar Joshi attached a 14-page annexure, which reported recommendations of "unnamed experts", apparently close to the RSS education branch and affiliate *Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan*[35]. Joshi's move to link education with nationalism did not simply promote "ethics, patriotism and classicism" (as Dasgupta [1998] euphemistically paraphrased it). It was a blatant attempt at saffronising education, at enforcing "a cultural agenda [...] by changing the curricula on the basis of the Sangh Parivar's philosophy of

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[34] *Five CMs oppose HRD minister's plan to 'Indianise' education.* Rediff.com 20 October 1998. http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/20hindu.htm [accessed 3 November 2006] and 'Taking Hindutva to school'. Muralidharan Sukumar and S.K. Pande. *Frontline.* Vol. 15; No. 23; 7-20 November 1998. Similarly, indigenous sciences such as *Vastu Shastras* and Vedic mathematics were promoted by the Education Ministry in an attempt of hinduize education, while the Ministry of Defence decided to sponsor research for the development of mythical weapons endowed with magical powers as mentioned in the epics.

[35] Ibid. *Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan* is a scheme set up under the auspices of the RSS that runs about 6500 schools across India. In the *Saraswati Sishu Mandirs* run according to this scheme, a core curriculum is taught along with all the subjects stipulated by state education boards. This core curriculum comprises six subjects: physical education, Sanskrit, music, yoga, moral and spiritual education, and *sanskriti gyan* (knowledge of culture). Moral and spiritual education is taught with precepts and quotations from the Veda and the Upanishads. Contributions of Indians to physics, chemistry and architecture are particularly stressed [Panikkar 2003] in order to create confidence in the mind of India's young generations.

nationalism"[36]. Indeed, when Joshi declared that "education should derive its sustenance from the strong points of India culture, tradition and history"[37], he was merely reiterating the RSS position according to which "the governing virtue of secularism in India has only been the denial of the indigenous national culture"[38]. The proposal included the compulsory teaching of Sanskrit from class III to X, stress on Indian early developments [Panikkar 2003] to increase "the essentials of Indian culture from 10 to 25 per cent"[39], moral and spiritual education at all stages, home economics for girls, and the mandatory singing of *Saraswati Vandana* and *Vande Mataram* to open and close the school day. As *Saraswati Vandana* is a hymn dedicated to the Hindu goddess of Learning (Saraswati) and *Vande Mataram* is India's official national song – this recommendation was particularly controversial.

India is in the singular position of having an official national anthem – Tagore's poem *Jana Gana Mana* – and a national song – *Vande Mataram*. In Chapter II, I discussed the controversial nature of *Vande Mataram* while mapping the symbolic repertoire of the nationalist movement. Murli Manohar Joshi's proposal to require singing *Vande Mataram* in school, further fuelled this symbolically poignant issue. A national anthem is not simply a song, but a representation of the country that contributes towards defining its sense of nationhood. It is a symbolic construction that simultaneously perpetrates and reinforces the spirit of nationalism. Principles of democracy and secularism as well as the desire to keep divisive symbols in abeyance inspired the Constituent Assembly's decision to declare *Jana Gana Mana* as the national anthem. Murli Manohar Joshi's intervention may have appeared innocuous, but in his partiality to *Vande Mataram* as India's most influential patriotic song, his proposal is symptomatic of the Sangh Parivar's intervention in cultural policy. Not only does the decision to introduce the singing of *Vande Mataram* in schools compromise the spirit of

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[36] *Five CMs oppose HRD minister's plan to 'Indianise' education.* Rediff.com 20 October 1998. http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/20hindu.htm Accessed 3 November 2006.

[37] 'Our students do not know India's problems'. Interview with Murli Manohar Joshi. *The Week,* 15 November 1998.

[38] 'Taking Hindutva to school'. Muralidharan Sukumar and S.K. Pande. *Frontline.* Vol. 15; No. 23; 7-20 November 1998.

[39] *Five CMs oppose HRD minister's plan to 'Indianise' education.* Rediff.com 20 October 1998. http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/20hindu.htm Accessed 3 November 2006.

secularism and violate Art. 28 (1) and (3) of the Constitution[40], but it is also symptomatic of the BJP-led government's political project "to redefine the Indian nation as Hindu, euphemistically claimed as the realisation of cultural nationalism" [Panikkar 2003][41].

This project establishing Hinduism and Hindu culture as the basis of India's national makeup is manifest in the BJP-led government's 1999 decision to invite the Indian Council of Historical Research [ICHR] and the National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT] to revise history textbooks. As Panikkar [2003] noted, the new textbooks published to date propound a Hinduised version of history that "is likely to contribute to the creation of a sense of popular ultra nationalism" and a sense of pride. Most importantly though, this new history is likely to promote and uphold "an ideology for organising the politics of identity, exclusion and hatred" [Panikkar 2003]. Besides, the manipulation of education curricula by the BJP and the appointment of people close to the Sangh Parivar in the bodies predisposed for the writing of the history textbooks raise issues regarding the functioning of the liberal state and the stability of a sense of nationalism in India. Education is one of the primary institutions used by the state to promote its national repertoire and also to reinforce national identity. In a liberal state there should be some guarantees for dealing with the fundamental issues such as that one of education. Education should not be at the mercy of partisan desires and it should respond to the state rather than the government. It is the state that must ensure that culture is being effectively produced [Gellner 1983] and people in charge for it should be independent. Education curricula

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[40] "(1) No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds"; (3) No person attending any educational institution recognised by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto".

[41] It is worth noting here that nowadays every session of parliament begins with the singing of *Jana Gana Mana* and ends with *Vande Mataram*. The decision to sing *Vande Mataram* at every Parliament session was not taken in 1947 but only in 1992 when the then speaker of the Lok Sabha – Shivraj Patil – insisted in implementing the unanimous resolution adopted by the General Purpose Committee of India's Parliament. [Bharatiya Janata Party. 1999. *Secularism. Rooted in India's Culture and Traditions.* New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Publications, page. 9].

should not represent partisan interests and change every time the government change. If that would happen, the character of nationalism would become increasingly unstable.

In other words, Murli Manohar Joshi's proposal to require singing *Vande Mataram* in schools not only violated both the spirit of the Constitution, but was also symptomatic of the Sangh Parivar's design to reshape India's cultural outlook[42]. By promoting *Vande Mataram* as the repository of India's patriotic tradition, the Sangh Parivar projected once again an image of India that is thoroughly Hindu. Although the hymn had acquired its own significance independently from Bankim's novel, *Vande Mataram*'s wording and imagery betray a distinct Hindu religiosity. It promotes a Hinduised conception of nationhood that is consistent with the Sangh Parivar's ideology. This event is illustrative of the Sangh Parivar's attempt at saffronising India's culture and education system in order to inculcate "desirable social and national values"[43] to create a monolithic Hindu nation, based on Hindu *Dharma* and *Samskriti*. This partisan promotion is eventually justified by the articulation of the powerful and persuasive metaphor of the divine *purusha* that pictures the ideal Indian state as the organic combination of distinct yet interdependent parts, "bound together by mutual concerns and commonsense of self-preservation" [Anderson and Damle 1997:72].

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[42] To celebrate India's fifty years of independence, in 1997 *Vande Mataram* underwent a facelift. Produced by one of the finest young Indian film composers, A R Rahman, the album *Vande Mataram* was released on the eve of the 50 Years of India's independence. For the occasion, Rahman and his group gave a live performance at India Gate in Delhi in front of a wide audience comprising the Prime Minister Gujral. In 2000, to mark the 50 years of the Indian Republic Rahman released an album entitled *Jana Gana Mana*. Unlike *Vande Mataram* which became an instant success and stirred some controversy, the release of *Jana Gana Mana* was a negligible event. In Rahman's version of *Vande Mataram* the tone is combative and the rhythm is strong. There is an energy in Rahman's song that was absent from previous versions and that matched India's new image as a no-nonsense, macho nation. The reactions triggered by the release of Rahman's new rendering of *Vande Mataram* are indicative. Swapan Dasgupta, editor of one of the most prestigious English language Indian weeklies, *India Today*, felt the young composer had finally freed the song from 'Nehruvian distortions' by setting it to an aggressive, combative tune. Another *India Today* columnist, Tavleen Singh, said Rahman's song was the only cheering item at the 50th year Independence Day celebrations in Delhi.

[43] *Five CMs oppose HRD minister's plan to 'Indianise' education.* Rediff.com 20 October 1998. http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/20hindu.htm Accessed 3 November 2006.

Masculinization of the Nation

Symbols of strength and weaponry, articulated through images of a militant and aggressive India, are important attributes of the Hindutva's brand of national identity. In this section I will argue that India's nuclear explosions at Pokhran in 1998 and the victorious war with Pakistan in Kargil in 1999 became the symbolic vehicles for the articulation of the concepts of national strength, pride and self-confidence. The 1999 NDA manifesto spelled out this policy when in its introduction claimed that this "National Agenda is a sincere and solemn covenant aimed at changing the content and culture of governance of one great nation, freeing it of the triple curses of hunger (*bhook*), fear (*bhay*) and corruption (*bharashtachar*), and transforming it into a New India that is prosperous, strong, self-confident and at peace with itself and world."[44] These words were echoed in Vajpayee's 1999 Independence Day speech in which he called upon all Indians to build a *Parishrmai Bharat* (Industrious India), a *Parakrami Bharat* (Self-confident India), and a *Vijay Bharat* (Victorious India)[45].

From the 1999 electoral campaign I will draw events that exemplify Hindutva's ideal of Indianness and negotiate images and symbols of the nation. Specifically, I will examine the Sangh Parivar's publications (electoral manifestoes and publicity material) and two public ceremonies (the show *Satyamev Jayate,* celebrating the BJP-led government's first year in power, and the 1999 Republic Day celebrations). These instances demonstrate the extent to which the articulation of concepts and symbols of pride and strength became constituent elements of the model of Indian identity promoted by the Hindu nationalists.

I Dream of a Strong and Prosperous India[46]

Illustrations of the Sangh Parivar articulation of pride and strength abounded in 1998 and 1999, when feelings of nationalism and patriotism grew following the Pokhran nuclear testing in 1998 that confirmed India's nuclear capability and the war with Pakistan in the Himalayan district of Kargil in 1999. At the time, every public

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[44] *For a Proud and Prosperous India. An Agenda.* National Democratic Alliance. http://www.bjp.org/manifes/manifest99.htm Accessed 25 October 2006.

[45] 'Agni-2 to be inducted'. *The Hindu*, 16 August, 1999.

[46] Interview to A B Vajpayee, in *Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Man India Awaits.* New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Publication, 1997, page. 9.

engagement was appropriated to fuel India's sense of pride and to increase its newly acquired strength on the world stage. Official speeches delivered by Vajpayee in its office of Prime Minister, addresses to the nation, as well as statements released on special occasions by various Sangh Parivar spokespersons, public ceremonies such as Republic Day, Independence Day, as well as electoral campaign speeches, provided suitable occasions to articulate those symbols of strength and pride. Even for Sushma Swaraj, to defeat Sonia Gandhi in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections became a question of national pride: "I feel allowing a person of foreign origin to become prime minister is an insult to India. Therefore, for me this is not an election to become an MP. It is an election to fight for India's national pride"[47]. Manifestos were variably entitled "For a Strong and Prosperous India" [1996] and "For a Proud, Prosperous India" [1998 and 1999].

India's nuclear weapons program was started at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Trombay. In the mid 1950s India acquired dual-use technologies under the "Atoms for Peace" non-proliferation program, which aimed at encouraging the civil use of nuclear technologies in exchange for assurances that they would not be used for military purposes. India's first nuclear test on 18 May 1974 was described by the Indian government as a peaceful nuclear explosion. After 24 years without testing, India resumed nuclear testing with a series of nuclear explosions known as "Operation Shakti". Prime Minister Vajpayee authorized the tests on 8 April 1998, two days after the Ghauri missile test-firing in Pakistan. On 11 May 1998, India tested three devices at the Pokhran underground testing site, followed by two more tests on 13 May 1998.

In the months that followed India's nuclear tests at Pokhran the arms race between India and Pakistan accelerated while their diplomatic relations deteriorated. Within a fortnight of India's five nuclear explosions, at the end of May 1998, Pakistan carried out six nuclear tests. After displaying Agni II at the 1999 Republic Day parade, India test-fired the weapon in April 1999, while in the midst of a parliamentary crisis

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[47] 'This is an election to fight for national pride': S. Swaraj http://www.bjp.org/election'99/aug3099a.htm. Accessed 11 October 2000.

that led to Vajpayee's loss of a parliamentary majority and new elections[48]. Three days later, Pakistan followed suit, test-firing two of its intermediate range ballistic missiles: Ghauri II and Shaheen. The international community was quick to blame India for having started this arms race. In the summer of that same year, India and Pakistan became involved in a protracted armed conflict in the Kargil district. The conflict's favourable resolution for India allowed the BJP to acquire political advantage from it in view of the ensuing parliamentary elections. At the following Independence Day speech [15 August 1999], Vajpayee without diluting his nationalist tones announced that Agni II would be inducted into the country's arsenal soon. The Indian Prime Minister also used the occasion of Independence Day to make bold nationalist remarks and to exhort the masses to consolidate their patriotism, the latter already heightened by the nuclear explosions and by the more recent Kargil conflict with PakBesides strategic military considerations, great symbolic value was imbued in India's nuclear capability. Not only did Pokhran become a triumph of the Vajpayee's government, "an achievement which deserves a mention in Indian history"[49], but it was also a signifier of India's strength (and even became a pilgrimage centre!). India now possessed a minimum credible deterrent and, by ending the P-5 (the five permanent members of the Security Council having nuclear weapons) nuclear monopoly, India now possessed a higher bargaining power and could therefore engage in international and diplomatic relations from a position of strength.

In addition to representing an accreditation for full participation on the international stage, the nuclear testing served as a fetish of scientific advancement by advocating the ideal of science and technology's command in India's narrative of modernity that partly replicated Nehruvian discourse[50]. As a symbol and celebration of

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[48] The test-firing of Agni was seen by some as a divertive and a stratagem to gain political advantage in view of the elections: "Agni-II could be a useful missile in an election campaign" ['Sparring in Thin Air, Seriously'. B R Shrikanth and Sunil Narula. *Outlook,* 26 April 1999]

[49] 'Anniversary of Pokaran II. The Crowning Achievement of Vajpayee Government'. *Organiser.* 9 May 1999, vol 1, no. 40.

[50] On the occasion of the 1998 nuclear explosions at Pokhran, Vajpayee added *Jay Vigyan* (Victory to the Scientist) to the slogan *Jay Jawan Jay Kisan* (Victory to the Soldier, Victory to the farmer) that was used in 1965 and 1971 during the wars with Pakistan. [http://www.indianembassy.org/inews/May_1999/TECHNOLOGY_DAY_OBSERVED.html]

scientific, military, and technological achievements, the nuclear explosions became common signifiers of strength and their visibility increased. Vajpayee immediately declared 11 May – the day of Pokhran[51] – "Technology Day". Significantly, 11 May became also known "Resurgent India Day"[52]. Similarly, a host of other publications and public ceremonies (such as *A Year of Achievements* released by the Hindutva party to celebrate the first anniversary of the BJP's government and the government paper released on the occasion of the Pokhran explosions) assigned enormous prestige to the nuclear testing and contributed to making Pokhran a symbolic event. A good example can be drawn from a booklet entitled *For a Proud and Prosperous India – An Agenda,* which was issued on the eve of the 1999 general elections by the BJP on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance [NDA]. A slight publication of twenty pages, including nine glossy photographs of Vajpayee, the text's brevity belied the laden visual information it projected. If, at first glance, these pictures appear to present Vajpayee as the most suitable candidate for the office of Prime Minister, their connotative meaning emerges in the last four images. These photographs showcase four events that illustrate the government's achievements: nuclear testing, the Kargil war, Vajpayee's Hindi speech at the United Nation, and the prime minister celebrating *Holy*. If on a denotative level these images highlight the qualities of the BJP's government, on a

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Accessed on 13 July 2005] *Jay Vigyan* was also visually reproduced [See Fig.24]. In the aftermath of the nuclear tests, the VHP immediately called for the construction of a temple some fifty kilometres from Pokhran to be dedicated to *Shakti,* the Hindu goddess of strength [Bhatt 2001:1 and 'VHP Firm on Pokhran Temple. BJP Silent'. *Indian Express,* 21 May 1998].

[51] In keeping with the Sangh Parivar's modus operandi the nuclear explosions were conducted on a day already set aside for a religious celebration. In fact, 11 May 1998 was also Buddha *Purnima,* a Buddhist festival celebrating the day when Buddha was born, obtained enlightenment and attained Nirvana. This festival is usually celebrated on the full moon of the month *Vaisakh*. Significantly, the coded message that informed the authorities of the successful outcome was "Buddha's smiling". At work here we can see the skilful appropriation by the Hindutva's forces of significant and already established religious celebrations for the promotion of their own agenda. By equating technological progress with Buddhism the Sangh Parivar aimed not simply at endowing the technological event of a religious significance (whereby modern technology is justified by the recourse to religious discourse as it was noted by Kaur 2000) but also at co-opting the Buddhist community by participating to their celebrations. On the Sangh Parivar's relation to Buddhism, see note 23 Chapter 5.

[52] The decision was taken after Murli Manohar Joshi's suggestion. [http://www.indianembassy.org/inews/May_1999/TECHNOLOGY_DAY_OBSERVED.html Accessed on 13 July 2005]

connotative level they are the visual counterparts and symbols of the Sangh Parivar's idea of India: strong, proud, culturally Hindu yet modern.

Dramatic events and public ceremonies accompanied discursive articulations of pride and strength as constituent elements of the Sangh Parivar's national identity. The 1999 Republic Day parade and the show *Satyamev Jayate* were selected from among the highly diversified calendar of public celebrations set up both by the Sangh Parivar and the BJP-led government in Delhi. The army always features prominently in the Republic Day parade, but the show was also designed to showcase India's cultural diversity. In 1999, however, the festivities were dedicated to celebrating military strength, and manifested India's attack capability as well as its commitment to deterrence. The short-range surface-to-surface Prithvi missile was on display, along with other missiles (Trishul, Akash and Nag), demonstrating the range of India's military arsenal. India's capability to carry out long-range (nuclear) attacks was also reflected by the inclusion of SU-30 planes and Jaguars in the fly-past display of India's Air Force. But it was Agni II, India's Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile, appearing for the first time on the parade that stole the show. The decision to display Agni was a political one rich in political meaning. Indeed, for India, Agni was a "symbol of that resurgent India which is able to say, yes, we will stand on our own feet" [Vajpayee 1999]. Such a show of prowess was symptomatic of India's renewed military assertiveness. The inclusion of Agni in the Republic Day parade indicated the Government intention to introduce Agni in its strategic arsenal in particular if it wanted to build a credible minimum nuclear deterrent as, without an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile, India's nuclear capability would be incomplete[53].

An event organised in Delhi in March 1999 by Pramod Mahajan, Minister of Information and Broadcasting planned to celebrate BJP's first year in government became another arena in which symbols of strength and pride were negotiated. The title given to the event was the motto that is inscribed at the bottom of India's national symbol, *Satyamev Jayate*.

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[53] 'Agni hogs limelight at R-Day Parade'. *The Hindu*, January 26 1999..

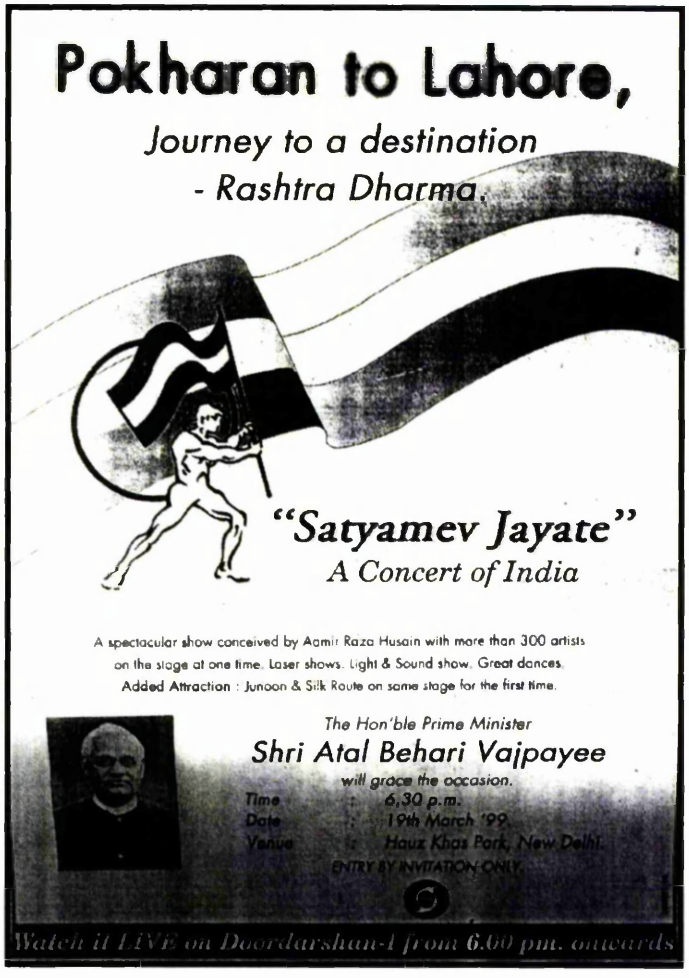

Fig. 12 Publicity for the show *Satyamev Jayate* March 1999

The event – dubbed by some newspapers a 'cultural extravaganza',[54] – took place in south Delhi. The theme for the event was *Rashtra dharma*, meant to highlight the achievements of the Vajpayee's Government. *Rashtra Dharma* was encapsulated on stage by images of *shakti* [55](represented on stage by reproduction of Pokhran, India's second nuclear explosion) and *shanti* (visualised by the recreation of the Wagah border between India and Pakistan and by the presence on stage of the very bus that took Vajpayee to Lahore only a month earlier[56]). Aamir Raza Hussain's play aptly entitled

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[54] 'The 1947 Dream Betrayed'. Dixit, J N. *Hindustan Times*, March 311999.

[55] The concept of strength was also symbolised in the publicity material issued to promote the event. The main logo carried the outline of a strong muscular man pictured holding the Indian flag. Along with the caption "Pokharan to Lahore, Journey to a destination – *Rashtra Dharma*", the imagery employed evoked images of military might and just rule [see picture 16].

[56] The bus was a direct reference to what became known as Vajpayee's bus diplomacy. In the months preceeding the *Satyamev Jayate* the Prime Minister travelled to Pakistan in a much-publicised diplomatic stunt that symbolically opened up diplomatic relationship with Pakistan.

Satyamev Jayate, was the piece de resistance of the show. This event presented in a dramatic way images of the India that was and the India that will be. This play, as a celebration of Indian history, encapsulated five thousand yeof the country's traditions. It featured episodes extracted from India's myths and history (such as Krishna's sermon to Yudhishththira, Buddha's message of non-violence and Chanakya's political mantra to Chandragupta Mauria) and included references to the Mahabharata, Ashok's reign, to the 1857 Mutiny, to the martyrdom of Indian revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh, and to Gandhi's *Dandi March* and his *satyagraha* movement. After 1948, the show however jumped straight to 1998, the first year of Vajpayee's government ignoring completely India's first fifty years of independence. By glossing over forty-odd years of Congress rule, *Satyamev Jayate* was obviously a representation of the BJP's own 'tryst with destiny[57]', a beginning of a new era in India's history.

The symbolism of the event was articulated in different ways. By representing the great rulers of India (including the mythological ones of the Mahabharata) this event aimed at connoting that the legacy and continuity of the Vajpayee's government stretched directly from the immemorial past and was in keeping with India's cultural traditions, a theme very dear to the Sangh Parivar. Moreover, by neglecting the first fifty years of independence the show was an exercise in the rewriting of Indian history and a de-legitimization of Congress rule. Significantly, Pokhran and the re-opening of diplomatic ties with Pakistan (symbolised by the reconstruction of the Wagah border and by the bus on stage) were chosen to highlight Vajpayee's achievements. By selecting Pokhran and Vajpayee's bus diplomacy as the two most significant events of the BJP's government *Satyamev Jayate* projected ideas of strength and pride and of political and military might. Republic Day celebrations and *Satyamev Jayate* are but two of the official national ceremonies set up by the government. Other public events – such as the *Vayu Shakti*, the annual fire power demonstration (held at Pokhran in 1999), or the Resurgent India Day/Technology Day (celebrated to mark the first anniversary

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[57] On 11 May 1999, speaking at a function held in Delhi to observe "Technology Day", and paraphrasing Nehru's famous speech, Vajpayee called the previous year's nuclear tests India's tryst with destiny and a symbol of a resurgent India.
[http://www.indianembassy.org/inews/May_1999/TECHNOLOGY_DAY_OBSERVED.html, accessed on 13/07/2005 16:44]

of Pokhran nuclear tests) – became useful vehicles for the articulations of the concepts of pride and strength as parameters of India identity[58].

Besides the articulation of images of a militant and aggressive India, the concept of national pride and strength also involves the "intensification of the desire to be recognised in the world and move upwards in the imagined global hierarchy" [Hansen 1996:603]. Even the choice of language [Hindi] of Vajpayee's address to the 53rd United Nations General Assembly 1998 singularly symbolised this growing desire and newfound attitude. Indeed, the Sangh Parivar's desire to redefine India's role at the international level is a reflection of the recently-emerged Indian middle class's aspiration to place India on "a newly liberated path of progress and economic prominence on the world stage" [Chakravarty and Gooptu 2000:91]. Whereas before India was leader of the non-alignment movement, paladin of the third-world, now the

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[58] The show *Satyemv Jayate* was only the culmination of a two-months publicity campaign launched by the BJP to highlight the achievements of the Vajpayee's government. Significantly, Vajpayee's government first birthday coincided with the beginning of the 52nd century of the Kalyug and Ugadi (the beginning of the Kannada and Telugu New Year), according to the Hindu calendar. Indeed, those were very hectic days for the Government. While on that day the Prime Minister took part to the Ugadi celebrations at a function in New Delhi, the next day he also celebrated one year of his government by participating at a community meal in the Sikheda Village in Ghaziabad district, before taking part to the Hauz Khas extravaganza. The government was also busy sponsoring other two official functions. Murli Manohar Joshi, the then Minister of Human Resources, on 18 March inaugurated the "Year of Sanskrit" at a public function, calling for the popularisation and long-term development of Sanskrit. At another official function, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting's present to Vajpayee was a cricket match organised to launch Doordarshan new sport Channel. These celebrations also fell on the Hedgewar's 110th birth anniversary, which the BJP-led government did not fail to commemorate with the release of a commemorative stamp in honour of the Hindutva ideologue. Celebrating a broad spectrum of achievements, these public functions reflected Vajpayee's government success not only on the political arena, but also on the cultural and social fronts as well. However, during these celebrations, the government sent out contrasting signals. If on the one hand, with its two months publicity campaign it aimed simply at publicising the government achievements, on the other, with the Prime Minister participating to Hindu functions and the government openly supporting celebrations of Hindu culture (such as the Year of Sanskrit and the beginning of the 52nd century of the *Kalyug*), it was clear that the government – under Sangh Parivar's pressures – was celebrating Hindu culture and traditions as constituent of Indian make-up. For the occasion, MTNL – India's main government-run telephone exchange company – by government decision, put on thirty per cent of all telephone exchanges an automated greeting message for the Hindu New Year (there were three different messages: "Wish you a happy *Ugadi*"; *Nav samvat ki shubhkamanayen*" and Wish you a happy new *samvat*"). Incidentally, this was not the first time that MTNL had put an automated greeting. On 15 August 1998, callers were greeted by the words "*Vande Mataram*".

image of the country that is being projected is of a *Vijay Bharat*, "an India that is prosperous, strong [...] an India that regains a place of honour in the comity of great nations"[59]. The fact that the nuclear explosions of 1998 guaranteed India the acquisition of a higher status among the international community made Pokhran an obvious sign of pride and of acquired self-confidence. These sentiments were articulated time and again in a variety of occasions. Vajpayee variously described India, "whose prestige in the world has gone up", as standing "proudly on the world stage — tall, self- reliant, and full of self-confidence" "her head held high" [Vajpayee 2003]. India that is both a "modern nation and an ancient civilization", is now "an emerging global economic power [...], a powerful country, dedicated to the ideal of peace" and "on her way to attaining greatness" [Vajpayee 2001]. India's international prestige was also reflected in India's foreign policy. Dictated by a desire to attain a major power status in the area, since Vajpayee became Prime Minister, India initiated a new bold and forward foreign policy that called for a new internationalism. India's pro-active foreign policy was meant to strengthen diplomatic, economic and military ties with countries of south, central and east-Asia. Breaking free of its "inward-looking strategic insularity", besides dealing with its immediate neighbours Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, India struck diplomatic deals with Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Myanmar, and Vietnam "in an attempt to carve out a larger regional role for itself in keeping with its perceived vision and strength"[60].

Fig. 13 A B Vajpayee Addressing an Election Rally in Haryana

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[59] 'Agni-2 to be inducted' *The Hindu* 16 August, 1999.

[60] 'Strategic realignments' *Frontline*. Rahul Bedi Volume 20 - Issue 13, June 21 – 4 July 2003

Fig. 14 Poster in support of Kargil 1999

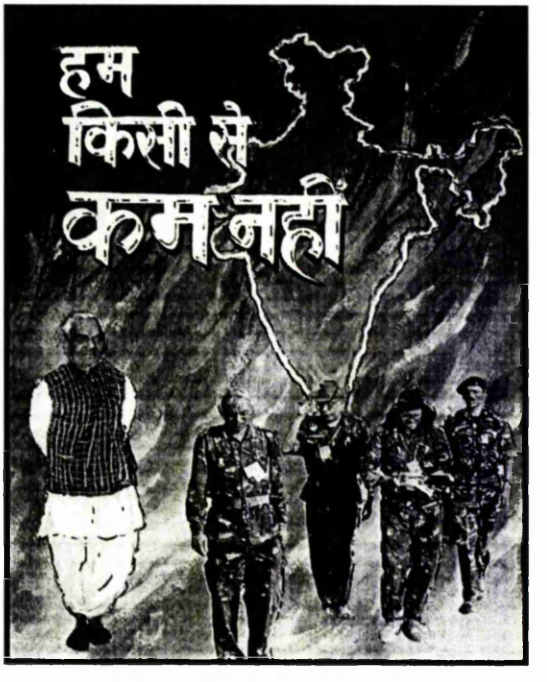

Fig. 15

The BJP together with its allies in the National Democratic Alliance [NDA] and the *Sangh Parivar* aimed at building a "proud and prosperous" India, and at repositioning India into a newly arranged world map where people are proud to be called Indian. The nuclear explosions at Pokhran in 1998, the government direct involvement in the peace process with Pakistan initiated by Vajpayee in February 1999

with what goes under the name of "Bus Diplomacy", the refusal of any intermediary to resolve the conflict with Pakistan in Kashmir, the strong emphasis on *swadeshi* in economic matters, are deliberately projecting a strong and assuring image of India. Public ceremonies, BJP publications, and Vajpeyee's official speeches conjure up distinct and well-defined images of the Indian common men and women that people the Sangh Parivar's imagined nation.

Ram – History in Full[61]

> Is there a man in the world today who is truly virtuous? Who is there who is mighty and yet knows both what is right and how to act upon it? Who always speaks the truth and holds firmly to his vows?
> Who exemplifies proper conduct and is benevolent to all creatures? Who is learned, capable, and a pleasure to behold?
> Who is self–controlled, having subdued his anger? Who is both judicious and free from envy? Who, when his fury has aroused in battle, is feared even by the gods?
> [...] His name is Ram and he was born in the house of the Ikshvaku. [*Ramayan* I.1.2– 8][62]

So far, I have argued that the Sangh Parivar's symbolic repertoire is very vast and highly sophisticated. Time and again, Hindutva's leadership had skilfully employed key Hindu cultural symbols and public ceremonies to mobilize and compact the Hindu community by portraying an image of unity in spite of sect, caste and regional differences. With the Indian population over 80% Hindu, the appeal of these traditional religious symbols and rituals was often incontestable. The Sangh Parivar's mobilisation around sacred signs was an extraordinary event of great political significance. Yet one symbol in particular brought dramatic political and electoral success to the Sangh Parivar where many others failed. That symbol is the Hindu god Ram. The use of Ram as a rallying political/mythological figure, and the subsequent

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[61] V D Savarkar cited in Udayakumar [1997:23]

[62] If not otherwise specified, the Critical Edition of the Valmiki Ramayana will be used here and reference.

mobilisation for the 'liberation' of Ram's birthplace at Ayodhya, deployed in a campaign that lasted several years (and is not concluded yet)[63], had been conspicuous since the mid 1980s and had since dominated India's political debate, contributing to heighten the process of communalisation of politics. Indeed, the use of the symbol of Ram is usually acknowledged to have played a decisive role both in the "Hinduisation" of politics and the affirmation of Hindutva.

In this last section I examine the reasons behind this success and establish how and why the Sangh Parivar was able to capitalise on this issue. I do so by first addressing the dramatic symbolic potential of Ram and the Ramayan in the Hindu cultural traditions. Then I discuss how the Sangh Parivar was able to tap on this symbolic potential by building a new level of signification. I identify three motives: the Sangh Parivar's highly articulated mobilisation strategy, the influence waged by the media, in particular thanks to the televised serialisation of the *Ramayan* on state

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[63] Indeed, the signifying potential of this symbolic construct was not simply confined to the iconography of Ram and the use of the political potential of the Ramayan. On the contrary, it reached out, and actually hinged on the issue of the construction of a contested temple dedicated to Ram in Ayodhya in the exact place where the Babri Mosque once was erected. The Ayodhya dispute was a very long and emotional issue that was at the heart of Hindutva's mobilisation strategy. On 6 December 1992 the 16th-century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya was torn down by militant Hindus who vowed to replace it with a temple dedicated to Ram. The destruction of the mosque marked the highlight of a long mobilisation campaign of Hindu revivalism launched by the Sangh Parivar in the early 1980s. Interestingly, the idea of a campaign centred on the re-construction of a temple dedicated to Ram at Ayodhya was firstly put forward not by the Sangh Parivar, but by the former Uttar Pradesh Congress minister Day Dayal Khanna. It was he who initially wrote to Indira Gandhi in 1983 to demand the restoration of the temples of Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura. On 6 march 1983, at the Hindu Conference held in UP at Mazuffarnagar he made the same proposition. This time the RSS took up the issue. On Ramnavami 1983 Gulzarilal Nanda – former acting Prime Minister – founded the *Ram Janmaotsav Samiti*. On the same occasion the following year, during the celebrations he demanded the return of Ram's birthplace to the Hindus [Jaffrelot 1996:366; *Organiser* 1 May 1983 and 29 April 1984 and Rajagopal 2001:288]. On 27 July 1984 *Sri Ramjnmabhoomi Mukti Yajna Samiti* was founded. In 1986, the orders of the District Judge to open the gates to allow Hindus to worship there contributed to the escalation of the campaign which led in 1989 to the laying of the foundations of a Rama temple on land adjacent to the disputed mosque during an elaborated Vedic public ceremony (which itself was the culmination of an elaborated and prolonged campaign, the *Ram Shila Pujan*). From then onwards, the issue of the liberation of the temple in Ayodhya has been the rallying point of a mobilisation campaign which is not yet concluded.

television[64] and the use of new forms of public affiliation to the Hindu community along commodity logic [Rajagopal 2001].[65]

Ram – Metonym of Hindutva[66]

For the Sangh Parivar, the symbol of Ram and of his mythical birthplace Ayodhya became vehicles for the transmission of Hindutva's ideology and tools of mass mobilisation. Their effectiveness derived from their ability to convey a wide range of accessible meanings to an easy-to-reach public already familiar with the epic. Indeed, the Sangh Parivar, through the manipulation of these symbols articulated a large portion of its symbolic inventory. Moreover, the symbol of Ram could be easily visually reproduced thus providing visual support to the Hindutva propaganda. Actualised in the form of videos, films or simple images placed on posters, stickers and even *bindi*, the political message became immediate.

The mobilisation around the symbol of Ram is very significant if we consider that the *Ramayana* is one of the few works of literature which has produced an influence so profound in the life and thought of a people [Thiel-Horstman 1991]. The *Ramayana*[67] – along with the *Mahabharata* – are the leading Indian epic poems, rich mines of myths and legends which have preserved the memory of historical events, rituals and culture for over two thousand years. The *Ramayana* – as its title indicates: *the advancing of Ram* – tells the story of Prince Ram – an incarnation of Vishnu[68] – of his exile in the forest, of his quest to defeat the *rakshasa* Ravana and free his beloved

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[64] Other academics [see for instance Rajagopal 2001] have studied the role of the press [both English and vernacular] in the promotion of the Ayodhya issue, in order to assess their contribution to the communalisation of politics in India.

[65] Much has been written on Ayodhya and on the Sangh Parivar's mobilisation centred on the god Ram. For a comprehensive account see Gopal [1993], Pandey [1993], Hansen [1999], and Nandy [1995].

[66] Davis 1996.

[67] While acknowledging the plurality of the *Ramayana* tradition in Asia [Whaling 1980:5 and Thapar, 1989:74], I refer here to what it could be called the popular version of Ram's legend, where "popular means the familiar version of the classical myths, the version most likely to be known to an 'average' Indian: those narrated by family elders of by professional *religiosi* at festive and sacral occasions, enacted in folk plays and dance or portrayed in the easily paperback accounts of the Hindu gods" [Kakar 1978:5-6].

[68] Ram was not always conceived as an incarnation of Vishnu. It is generally agreed that the *Ramayana* has undergone a transformation from an original *kshatriya* poem into a *Vaishnava* work. On this subject, see Brockington 1984.

consort Sita. It is a poem of adventure, loyalty and morality. The compelling political potential of the symbolism of the Ramayana is directly related to the role played by the epic in India's contemporary society and collective imaginary. The *Ramayana* presents a number of behavioral models that have helped millions of people to cope with the difficulties of life, and he and Sita have become models for countless generations of Indians [Kakar 1987]. Indeed, the identification with Ram and Sita, allows the reader to cope with and control his/her own inner conflicts, as "both the traditional literature and modern field observations show, many Indians, both men and women, act out in their own lives the central plot of the *Ramayana* with all its negative entailments in the areas of sexuality, relation to authority figures, and emotional life in general" [Goldman 1986:59]. Ram represents the ideal son, king, brother, husband, and upholder of *dharma*. Ram is apparently never angry and he is not lustful because he is ideally self-restrained. He is endowed with a higher morality which derives from his serene deference to the elders – and to the codified principles of the elders' *dharma* – which eventually manifests itself in the lack of any emotion in accepting his own destiny, even when he renounces the throne and when he finally banishes Sita to certain death in the forest. Even the common iconography of Ram is faithful to this ideal: "Ram is *udar*, compassionate, benign, and graceful; he is ever-serene and ever-forgiving; he is ever-youthful, boyish almost, with a conspicuous lack of masculine power; and yet, he is the lord of the universe, the *maryada purushottam*[69]" [Kapur 1993:76-77].

To this already powerful and articulated symbolic repertoire, the Sangh Parivar has attached fresh meanings. Beside the old traditional meanings of tolerance, rightful conduct, and ideal family life, the Hindutva forces successfully reoriented the meanings of Ram by making it a symbol of the supposed attributes of Indianness (virility, prowess, pride, strength, and compassion), and a symbol of Indian culture at large [Hansen 1999:174] encompassing almost everything. Moreover, by contracting

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[69] *Mariada Purushottam* is an epithet that usually used for the god Ram. *Maryada Purushottam* is therefore used to indicate an exemplary man and an inspiration for everybody to follow in the path of justice, morality and sacrifice. The term also represents the ideal of individual and collective conduct.

India into the image of Ram, they made Ram and Ayodhya symbols of India's sacred geography.

This policy of elaboration of "usable and portable messages" [Basu et al 1993:61] was represented by dissemination of stickers and posters displaying Ram and the Ram temple and the image of *Ramlalla* which could be found in abundance on Ayodhya stalls. Besides contributing to the popularisation of the movement, these visuals played an important role in the modification of the over-all legend of Ram. Indeed, the famous image of Ram pulling his bowstring, fierce and bold, superimposed the model of the soon-to-be-built Ram's temple in Ayodhya contributed to the process of sliding of values [Fig.5]. It transformed Ram from a passive, quasi feminine, martial hero, into an aggressive Hindu king – a *Chakravartin*, the emperor who continuously expanded his territories – busy in fighting the invaders, the others, the Muslims:

> "[...] the Janmabhoomi issue has transformed Ram into a herald for demarcating geographic, territorial and spiritual boundaries. This politics of space has invented a Ram who is significantly different from the figure represented in the traditions of iconography available till now. The new images of Ram have altered the meanings of Ram bhakti and, as a consequence, of popular Hinduism as well." [Kapur 1993:74]

In these representations, the conventional compassionate and benign smile of Ram was replaced by a warlike image. This ideal of masculinity[70] – explicated through the qualities of anger and aggression – is part of the discourse of Hindu self-assertion where it stands in opposition to patience and tolerance, virtues once attributed to Hindus as innate and then identified as symbols of femininity and therefore of weakness and passivity. In the posters and postcards available during the movement, Ram was mainly depicted in two poses overhanging the image of the temple. In both,

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[70] Symbols of masculinity and aggressiveness were also articulated by the slogans that changed from being simply assertive (*saugandh Ram ki khate hain / ham vahin mandir banayenge* [We swear by Ram we will build the temple right there] and *bachcha-bachcha Ram ka/ Janmabhoomihe kaam ka* [every child belongs to Ram and for Ram Janmabhoomi]) to being violent and hostile: (*jis hindu ka khoon na khaule, khoon nahin vo pani hai/janmabhoomi ke kaan na aye, vo bekaar jawanee hai* [that Hindu whose blood does not boil has water in his veins, youth that does not serve Ram Janmabhoomi is youth lived in vain] or *jis Hindu ka khoon na khola, woh Hindu nahin, woh bhangi hai* [those Hindu who have not shed blood, they are not Hindu but of the sweeper caste]) *India Today*, Oct. 31 1989 and Basu et alii 1993:89

contrary to conventional representations that depict Ram *en famille* [Fig.16] – flanked by his brothers, valiant assistant Hanuman, or in company of his wife Sita – he is shown as a solitary hero. In one, despite being smiling and looking almost feminine, he is heavily armed, carrying the bow, a *trishul*, a sword, an axe and a variety of arrows on his back [Fig.17].

Fig. 16 King Ram sitting in his court with Sita, his brothers and Hanuman

Fig. 17 Ram in traditional iconography

This is the image of Ram the king, symbol of the Hindu golden Age and of martial prowess. Despite the usual androgyny and femininity of his conventional look, in this new iconography Ram embodied the virile, muscular warrior hero, symbol of strength and power. Standing against a stormy sky, his hair disarrayed by the wind, his torso – wider than usual – and his strong legs uncovered, he is drawing his bow, in profile as if he were aiming at some indistinct enemy. In these two aggressive

representations of Ram, he embodied the *angry Hindu*[71]. As a *kshatriya* king he is rightfully a warrior and the weapons he is carrying are meant to be used against today's enemies, the Muslims[72] [Fig. 18 e 19].

Fig. 18 Ram as a lone warrior

The Ram movement was also delivering ideas of rejuvenation and awakening. Because the story of Ram was central to constructing a collective Hindu identity in the name of nationalism, Ram as a warrior god became a great symbol of the resurgent Hindu nation. As the mythical king of Ayodhya, with his *Ram Rajya* he symbolised Hindus' golden age of prosperity[73] that provided also a model for Hindutva's Hindu

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[71]This term is taken from a widely distributed article published by the RSS in 1988. Some excerpts can be found in A. Rajagopal 1994, N. Bhattacarya 1991 and in C. Jaffrelot 1996.

[72] The representation of Ram as Ramlalla (infant Ram) was another popular image of Ram that circulated widely during the Ayodhya movement. Associable to the image of Bala Krishna, this image was a total innovation in the iconography of the *Ramayana* not only because the *Ramayana* tradition is particularly poor in details on Ram's childhood, but also because representations of Ram as a child are almost non-existent. Opposed to the aggressive image of the adult Ram warrior, the infant Ram – so vulnerable and helpless – called for protection, thus reinforcing belief in a need of an aggressive and assertive Hinduism propounded by the Sangh Parivar and articulated by the other images [Kapur 1993]

[73] The articulation of the myth of Ram becomes also a useful metaphor for the representation of Indian history as the Hindu nationalists present it. According to this perspective, Indian history has been reduced to a tripartite model that equates the ancient period to a presumed golden age, the Moghul period to an age of decadence, and the modern period to the age of revival.

Rashtra to come. Moreover, Ram's war against the *rakshasas* represented courage against oppression. Indeed, Hindutva's rhetoric (verbal and processual) was infused with an imagery of militant violence. While the infamous Advani's *Rath Yatra* was likened to a modern-day *Ashvamedha*, and pots of blood and the *tikka* of blood which were offered to the BJP leader during his march were reminiscent of blood sacrifices, Bajrang Dal's tridents and bows, and Krishna's *sudarshan chakra*[74] displayed by Advani himself reproduced images of ancient warfare [Davis 1996]. Besides being a symbol of masculinity and rejuvenation, Ram became also a metaphor of the catholicity of traditional Hindu forms of devotion articulated by appealing to Hindu traditions of tolerance and syncretism (contra another perceived tradition of Hindu divisiveness and heterogeneity – Hansen [1999]). Indeed the representation of Ram as a symbol of the positive core of Hinduism [Hansen 1999] is typical of the Sangh Parivar's branding of Hinduism which is "synthetic and cumulative" [Davis 1996:53], looking as it does for a common minimum denominator for the Hindu community[75].

Fig. 20 RSS Postcard of Ayodhya Temple with Ram

Given the multiplicity of the *Ramayana* tradition and its psychological significance in the formation of Indian personality, family and society, the Sangh Parivar's appropriation and manipulation of this tradition is extremely problematic. For the Sangh Parivar, Ram and Ayodhya became epitomes of Hindutva's strategy of

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[74] This discus is one of Krishna's weapons that he usually holds on either his little finger or index finger.

[75] During the agitation for the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, the Sangh Parivar singled out other common signs of affiliation to the Hindu community. Beside Ram, they chose the brick (*shilas*), common acts of devotion, water of sacred rivers, etc.

mobilisation. Taking stock of the success of the movement and of its contribution to the electoral victory of his party, Vajpayee candidly acknowledged that:

> "[T]he Ayodhya movement has no doubt contributed to this success. We joined the movement because Sri Ram epitomises the cultural heritage of all Indians, he symbolises our cultural nationalism. Through this movement, we were able to unleash the suppressed aspirations of millions of Indians and canalise their nationalist fervour towards nation-building. Indeed, the Ayodhya movement has effectively driven home the point that if Ram represented the ideal of conduct, *Ram Rajya*, to which the BJP is dedicated, represented the ideal of governance. The Ayodhya movement seeks to restore the temple at the birthplace of Sri Ram since this would contribute to the restoration of our cultural heritage as well as set right a grave historical wrong." [Vajpayee 1997].

Activating the Symbol

Although the *Ramayana* is endowed with a powerful illustrative political potential, only during the last decades of the twentieth century has Ram become an icon of political Hinduism. Ram is now not just a mythological or even historical figure, but a modern statesman, endowed with a political vision for India. Yet, the use of the *Ramayana* in politics has not always been consistent. Sheldon Pollock in his *Ramayana and political imagination in India* has demonstrated through the study of cultural production, how the *Ramayana* began to be predominant in Indian political imagery from the end of the twelfth century onwards. The *Ramayana* with its political mythology of efficacious simplicity was essentially a powerful ideological work, and it "was repeatedly instrumentalised by the Indian ruling elites of the middle period to provide a theology of politics and a symbology of otherness" [Pollock 1993:286]. According to Pollock, the imaginative resources of the *Ramayana* as a mytho-political narrative are represented by two basic statements present in each and every version of the epic: the divinity of kings and the demonisation of others. Indeed,

> "[T]he peculiar apparatus of othering offered by the *Ramayana*, along with the political theology it provided, seems to have been particularly well suited to the political tasks confronting an embattled cultural formation for representing – and perhaps activating – the conflicting agencies of the period" [Pollock 1993:284].

Even before the Sangh Parivar appropriated the symbol, the great popularity achieved by Ram's legend made the epic an easy vehicle for politicians and orators to

convey meanings to an easy-to-reach public. However, the mytho-political potential of the Ramayana as a symbol of otherness and a theology of politics was not really exploited. During the nationalist movement Mahatma Gandhi made great use of the *Ramayana* tradition and of Ram's cult by drawing from the great symbolic reservoir of the epic. His personal success depended on the use of Hindu devotional discourse [Van der Veer 1994:94]. Hindu traditional discourse of ascetism informed his symbolic language from his agitational practices (*satyagraha*) to his choice of sartorial style (his *khadi* loin cloth)[76]. Gandhi spoke to India through the idioms of Hinduism and used ideas and images (symbols and metaphors) drawn from popular Hinduism. He even generated an alternative terminology to that of Western politics. He invented some terms (*satyagraha*) and used *other* terms and concepts that lay at the heart of Hinduism (*ahimsa, brahmacharya, tapasya, moksha* and *dharma*)[77] but whose meanings he invested with greater signification. Gandhi used to quote liberally from both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which he considered invaluable sources of Hindu tradition, culture and civilisation, or as he put it, "unfailing guides through the trials of life"[78]. The invocations of Sita-Ram, Victory to Ram, *Ram Rajya*, the use of the epithet "Lord of Sita", that accompanied Gandhi's daily prayers provoked endless debates and aroused resentment among the secularists or those who were not of his religious faith. However, Ram and the Ramayana remained for Gandhi a useful metaphorical language that created means of communication and understanding between people, but not sources of symbolic representations of otherness. Contrary to Savarkar who stressed Ram's martial aspect and saw in *Ram Rajya* a symbolic representation of an ideal state of Hindu domination, Gandhi emphasised the peaceful aspect of the Ram symbol. For him *Ram Rajya* identified a state of perfect justice and harmony, rather than a Hindu golden age. Indeed, because it was not the exclusivist and divisive aspect of these paramount Hindu symbolic repertoires that was emphasised, for Gandhi, Ram was not one of the symbolic resources used to signify the boundaries within the in-group and the out-group.

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[76] On this, see Chapter 1

[77] *Swaraj* as a substitute term to 'home rule' and 'independence' was already active in the Indian nationalist vocabulary before Gandhi's entry into politics.

[78] *Harijan* 24-8-1934, p.221

The same cannot be said of Savarkar who, at about the same time that Gandhi invoked the name of Ram in his evening prayers, made use of symbols of Ram and *Ram Rajya*. In his *Essentials of Hindutva,* he uses the term *Ram Rajya* as a metaphor to provide a rallying point for cultural and political assertiveness and as a model for the Indian nation-state. Here *Ram Rajya* was a symbol of Hindu rule and of "national and cultural unity" [Savarkar 1949:10] that lasted through the centuries. This supposed national unity of India was reached when Ram defeated Ravana and "brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the sea under one sovereign sway" [ibid]. With that victory and with the knitting together of the Aryans and non-Aryan population of India, the nation was born [ibid]. By promoting an image of political and geographical unity and cultural homogeneity, Ram and the Ramayana partly articulated the symbols of otherness inherent in the mytho-political narrative of the Ramayana.

However, despite Ram's versatile symbolic potential – both as a role of behaviour and political ideal – and Savarkar's activation of the Ramayana discourse of unity and otherness, Ram and the Ramayana were not always part of the symbolic repertoire of Hindutva. Indeed, the Sangh Parivar drew on the complex symbolism provided by the Ramayana only relatively recently. This symbolic potential remained untapped by the Sangh Parivar as, until 1973, Golwalkar, leader of the RSS, rejected the use of overt religious rituals and imagery for mobilisation [Golwalkar 1980:24 in Rajagopal 1999:58]. He chose indeed a new symbolic apparatus for the RSS, but in his ideal, religion was subsumed to the idea of nationalism. On the contrary, Deoras, the following *sarsanghchalak,* believed in using religious symbols for mass mobilisation [Malik and Singh 1994:163] opening the door to utilization of images/symbols derived from Hindu repertoire. Only much later, with the creation of the VHP, were religious rituals and practices used systematically for political mobilisation. In this process Ram and Ramayana came to play a central role.

Why was the complex symbolism of the Ramayana activated only then? According to some scholars, the difference from the past lays in Hindutva's change of strategy. The Hindutva alliance passed from a strategy based on coalition politics to

one of ethno-mobilisation [Jaffrelot 1996] and launched a series of *jagaran* – awakenings – to arouse Hindu militancy for the creation of a consolidated Hindu vote bank which could cut across caste and sect lines. However, the Sangh Parivar's utilisation of the Ramayana's repertoire of images would have been unsuccessful were it not associated with its elaborate ritual activity, the contingent – but all the same crucial – broadcasting of the Ramayana on state television and the emergence of new forms of affiliation to the Hindu community [Rajagopal 2001].

Methods of Mobilisation

The use of the symbol of Ram in processional ritual action was effectively launched in October 1984 with the *Sri Ram Janmabhūmi Mukti Yajna Yatra* (Sacrifice to liberate Ram's Birth-place), a 130-kilometer march from Ayodhya to Lucknow organised by the VHP with the sole aim of 'liberating' Ram's birthplace. A day after the march reached Lucknow (October 15) a *Shri Ram Janaki Ratha* was launched to mobilise public opinion and announce the *'Janmasthan Mukti* Pledge[79]' to the people. On that occasion, images of Rama and Sita were once again carried in procession across Uttar Pradesh and Bihar touring 25 sites. For the first time, the Hindu nationalists exploited the traditional format of *bhakti* rituals to which however, they attached fresh ideological meanings, and which eventually resulted in what Jaffrelot dubbed an "aggressive political *bhakti*" [1996:392]. The well-orchestrated *Ram Shila Pujans* and the foundation ceremony of the temple dedicated to Ram followed in 1989[80]. These large-scale processual activities culminated with Advani's 1990 notorious *Ratha Yatra*[81].

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[79] A pledge for the liberation of Ram's birthplace.

[80] *Ram Shila Pujans* were powerful and most effective mobilisation strategy launched by the VHP that allowed the combination of the motif of the religious pilgrimage with local initiatives [Datta 1993]. Villages and districts were invited to build bricks, or Ram Shila, and send them to Ayodhya in order to contribute to the construction of the Ram temple. *Ram Shila Poojan* ceremonies were held simultaneously on 30th September to consecrate these bricks which carried the name of Ram on one side and the name of the village on the other. Further collective ceremonies were held on 11th October and on 9th November when the foundation ceremony took place.

[81] The BJP's basic political programme explicitly brought forward these ideals. The political spearhead of the Sangh Parivar candidly embraced the Ram issue. Not only was its leadership in the forefront of the Ayodhya campaign leading a series of *yatras* across the country, but the BJP's 1991 electoral manifesto was significantly entitled *Towards Ram Rajya*. The poster campaign that accompanied the electoral propaganda of that year was also inspired by the movement. One of the BJP posters was plainly entitled "Can 'Rome Raj' ever win against 'Ram Raj'". The picture that illustrated the poster reproduced a bow and quiver/ arrows and a pair of

Advani travelled across north India on an air-conditioned Indian made DCM Toyota van of the type used by several politicians in 1989 electoral campaign but decorated in the style of the *rath* used by the warrior god Arjuna in the televised *Mahabharata* serial, with saffron flags and with the BJP electoral symbol – the lotus – and the *Om*.

It is interesting to note that in some instances – such as during the *Rath Yatra* – the language (visual and verbal) was not overtly religious. However, a sense of the sacred was conveyed by the use of the imagery articulated in the idiom of religious processions, in the ritual language of pilgrimage, of sacrifice, martyrdom and initiation, in the devotional responses to the *Rath Yatra*, in the display of militant zeal with ancient guerrilla warfare, in the presentation of the saffron flag and chanting and displaying of the *Om* mantra and symbol [Fig. 21].

Fig. 21 Advani as Arjun. Backcover of *Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra* Booklet

All these processional activities eventually established Ram as the most prominent Hindutva symbol. Beside aiming at compacting the Hindu community and consolidating the Hindu vote by portraying an image of unity in spite of caste, sect,

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sandals [*paduka*]. While *Ram Raj* was the basic model for the Hindu nation, the connotations elaborated by the representation of these attributes of Ram (as a ruler and as a warrior) were clear to all. The *paduka* were referring to a well-known episode in the *Ramayan* when Bharat – Ram's brother who's just become heir to throne instead of Ram to fulfil a vow of his stepmother Kaikeyi – on Ram's leaving for his fourteen years exile, asks him for his *paduka* to place them on the throne to represent Ram in its absence. With its articulation of the symbology and imagery of the *Ramayan* the poster primarily symbolised self-sacrifice and devotion to duty of both Ram and Bharat, but the ultimate meaning was also to suggest anticipation and readiness for Ram's symbolic return [see Fig.22].

and regional differences, according to Hansen [1999:161], processions and events such as the *Ram Shila Puja* intended to give "materiality [...] to the spatial imagination of a Hindu Rashtra" and to foster a "new sense of religious community imagined around the national geography and sites like Ayodhya" [Hansen 1999:157].

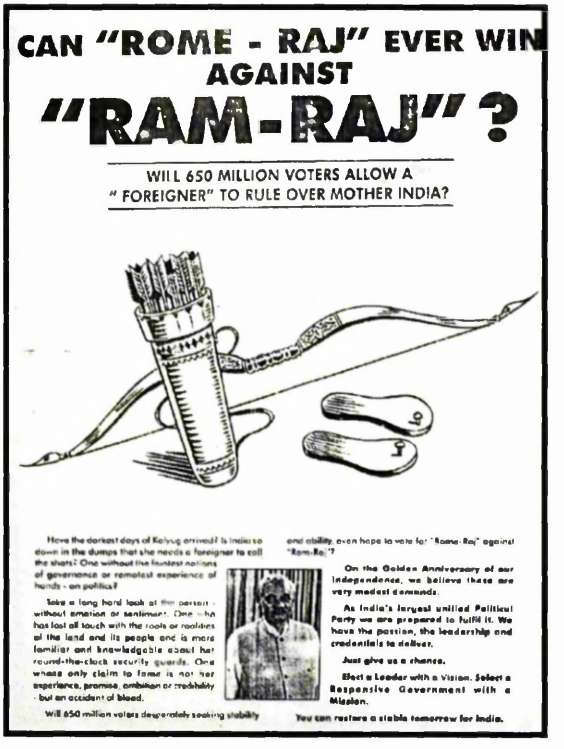

Fig. 22 BJP Election Poster

The Media at the Service of Ram

Rajagopal [2001] argues that the press (in particular the vernacular) and the state-sponsored TV channel Doordarshan equally contributed to the establishment of the Ram symbol as a crucial element of national identity, a phenomenon which led eventually to the reinforcement of a Hindutva-inspired national identity. Media, as I argued (see chapter I), cannot by themselves generate cultural identities. However, they are one of those national institutions that contribute to creating, maintaining, and transforming a sense of national belonging.

In chapter I, I noted that a crucial characteristic of mass media in their contribution to the process of nation building was that they create moments of shared collective experiences. Between 1987 and 1989 the *Ramayana* serial became a powerful media event that contributed to the creation of a feeling of belonging to a specific cultural community and to the transmission of particular common memories and

traditions. The serial was directed by a Bombay filmmaker, Ramanand Sagar. During the early 1980s, Sagar had already approached Doordarshan with the proposal of a serialisation of the *Ramayana* in fifty-two episodes, which was categorically refused by the Doordarshan headquarters with the apparent concern that it would arouse communal sentiments. It eventually received the go-ahead only in 1986 then becoming a very popular show. The popularity of the serial was such that for millions of Indians nothing was allowed to interfere with the watching of the *Ramayana*. Newspapers reported that in many cases weddings and funerals were delayed, Sunday morning cinema shows were cancelled, and even highway traffic declined during the airing of the serial. It is within this framework that the serialisation of the Ramayana must be understood.

Ramayana goes on Air

On January 25, 1987 Doordarshan broadcast the first episode of the serialised adaptation of the *Ramayana*. Transmitted on Sunday mornings at 9.30 a.m., it soon became *the* major event ever shown on Indian television. The serial was originally scheduled to run fifty-two episodes of forty-five minutes each, but due to popular demand it had to be extended three times. It finally grew to seventy-eight episodes and, after an interval of a couple of months, was followed up by a sequel relating the events contained in the *Uttarakanda*

The airing of the *Ramayan* was an unprecedented event both in terms of audience reception and of its political significance. Partly the success of the televised *Ramayana* could be found in its integration into the performance tradition and religious culture of India. Despite the vociferous protestations of mostly the urbanised western-educated middle class[82] reported in the English-language press who resented the overall low quality of the serial, the *butchering* [Lutgendorf 1995:226] of the epic tradition and who accused the Sagar *Ramayana* of being a "poorly acted, still more

[82] To Lutgendorf [1995] the English-language press criticism of the *Ramayan* demonstrate their ignorance of the Indian performance traditions and aesthetic conventions and it was an expression of an urbanised western-educated middle-class, alienated from the India's *genuine* everyday life. The western-educated intellectuals were too detached from the folkloric-popular Indian tradition to understand the charm that the Sagar *Ramayana* exerted on the audience and to see that it could be integrated perfectly with the classical *Ramayana* tradition

poorly produced, lurid dramatisation of the epic" [Deshpande 1988:2215], the serialised version of the epic was not only in keeping with the *Ramayana* tradition in India but also with India's customary performative and religious traditions. Thus, in a way, the Sagar *Ramayana* was nothing but another retelling of the epic. Sagar – the *Tuslidas of the video Age* [Lutgendorf 1995:228] – presented some original modifications to the epic and gave new interpretations to certain episodes of the story[83]. Dressed in white, beatific, Sagar often appeared in the introductory or concluding portions of the cassette version of the epic commenting on the events presented and on general moral issues. As such the Sagar *Ramayana* represented an authoritative contemporary commentary of the *Ramayana* and Sagar, who in the very last episode ventured as far as to include himself among a party of assembled deities in singing the praise of the newly crowned Ram, embodied at the same time the figure of the story-teller and of the commentator, thus reinventing himself in the tradition of sages who have handed down the epic.

Moreover, according to Lutgendorf [1995], the televised *Ramayana* revealed continuities with *katha* and *ramlila* performances in some representative conventions and in the performance script where certain interpretative decisions had to be taken. These decisions were not totally arbitrary but were restrained by traditional exegesis[84]. The scenes of devotional activities that repeatedly happened during the broadcasting of the serial were not signs of a widespread hysteria but they were rather consistent with the religious tradition of *darshan*, taken as opposed to the oral recitation of the epic and complementary to the *shruti*. In keeping with the religious merits traditionally attributed to the epic, a large audience found the serial spiritually uplifting [*Ramayana* I.1.77-79 and Goldman 1984:126]. The focus on the facial expression and gestures of the characters – in fact, much of the time the screen was dominated by large heads through repeated close-ups to fully portray the emotional state of the character – was a convention popular both to Hindi films and the mime techniques of Bharat Natyam

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[83] See for example the case of the Queen Kaikeyi whom he partly redeems from the guilt of being the cause of Ram's ruin and eventually of Dasharatha's death.

[84] For an exhaustive report on the representative conventions adopted by Sagar, see Lutgendorf 1995.

and Kathakali. As such, the Sagar *Ramayana* was an independent retelling of the epic, culturally authentic, and in touch with the older performance traditions.

Apart from its important aesthetic attributes that ensured its belonging to a particular cultural tradition and determined its astonishing success, the Sagar *Ramayana* played a crucial role in the process of the communalisation of politics witnessed in India in the late 1980s. The broadcasting of the serial coincided with the crucial phase of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, when "it changed from a relatively unknown *tala-kholo* agitation to the dominant political issue before the country" [Rajagopal 1994:1661], and with the escalation of communal violence. In this respect, two questions must be kept in mind. First the political implication of the televised epic must be framed within the gradual communalisation of state-run institutions such as Doordarshan. And second, the repercussions the broadcasting inevitably had in the political domain have to be analysed against the background of the mobilisation strategy of the Sangh Parivar of those years.

The decision to put the *Ramayana* on air represented a significant change from earlier Doordarshan policies. Until the late 1980s, a kind of *secularism* was operative in Indian public broadcasting that meant that the national media should refrain from sustained programming targeted to one specific community. This was in keeping not only with the parameters of Nehruism and the dictates that the notion of national media (the paradigms of national media) entailed [see chapter I and III]. Unlike first world country's state run broadcasting, in India state's monopoly of national media was predicated on the development communication paradigm which correlated modernity, mass media and development[85]. This development paradigm came to include also a vigorous inculcation of a national identity. The modernisation paradigm, predicated a merge between material development (in other words, the promotion of socio-economic development) and national development, according to which modernity came to be equated with the creation of a national identity and the fostering of a sense of loyalty to it among India's citizens.

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[85] On this, see Farmer 2000.

However, the emergence of state television – which made its national official maiden appearance only in 1982 with the broadcasting in colour of IX Asian Games (Asiad) – signalled a change of attitude. What changed was the monopoly of the media by the ruling party, rather than the state. Given the assumed persuasive potential of the medium, television was blatantly used to ensure Congress re-election – electoral success [Farmer 2000:265]. The justification for the centralisation and control of India's mass media was found no more in the developmental paradigms – as, by then it was painfully obvious to all that material development had not occurred as promised. On the contrary, it was predicated on the language of cultural nationalism and television became associated with the promotion of a national identity whose character and ethos were identified with the ruling national party. This shift happened during the last years of Mrs Gandhi's rule, but it was under Rajiv Gandhi that the politicisation of India's state television was fully accomplished. Between 1983 and 1991 the monopoly of India's ruling party – the Congress – over television infrastructure and programming was unrestricted. A strategic decision was then taken "to broadcast appealing, popular programming in order to build a broad audience for effective political communication" [Farmer 2000: 266]. Thus television was used as a tool to promote a national identity through the projection of an Indian national character and ethos identified with the ruling national party. Like other mass media ventures under Nehru, television programming in India did not reflect an existing homogeneous national culture. On the contrary, it strove to *create* one. Television was thus used to *inculcate* a national identity through media representations.

It is within this context that the serialisation of the *Ramayan* must be understood[86]. Indeed, according to Sagar, the airing of the *Ramayana* received the blessing of Rajiv Gandhi himself[87]. Moreover, television became a contentious political issue in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections and Rajiv Gandhi on different occasions was

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[86] Before the *Ramayan* another serial – the soap opera *Hum Log* – had captured the Indian public.
[87] *Organiser*, 20 Nov. 1987, p.12. According to Rajagopal [2000] initially Rajiv Gandhi expressed his reservations on the airing of the Hindu epic and Doordarshan's departure from previous policies.

accused of playing the Hindutva card for electoral purposes. Therefore, Doordarshan programming contributed to the production of a national identity that was north Indian, Hindi-speaking, middle class and Hindu. Several were the consequences of this change of policy. On the one hand, it produced an unknowing widening of the split between the nation (majoritarian and homogeneous – as it was presented on television) and those who were excluded. On the other, it produced a series of contradictions which clashed with the – till then – dominant image of a secular, federal and developing India [Farmer 2000].

The political implications of Doordarshan in the rise of communal politics in India must be framed against this background of increasing communalisation of national media. The Sagar *Ramayana* indeed heavily contributed to the creation of a national Hindu identity through the propagation of the image of Ram as the paramount religious idol and national hero. The appeal of Sagar to the Valmiki and Tulsidas *Ramayana* and to other regional and vernacular versions, instead of being symptomatic of a great cultural tradition, was an attempt of transforming the *Ramayana* in a potent unifying national symbol, denying the multivocal tradition of the epic and promoting a standardised version of it.

Moreover, the serialised Ramayan created a visual and symbolic lexicon which formed the basis of the Sangh Parivar imagery employed in its mobilisation strategy for the construction of the temple in Ayodhya. Due to the tremendous impact of the serial, Hindu nationalist leaders did not have to spend time projecting Ram as the paramount Hindu god and national hero; they could proceed directly to building on the themes outlined by the Sagar *Ramayana* by promoting a national character and ethos in line with the Hindutva brand of national identity:

> "Viewed in the privacy of the home, the notion of a great Hindu culture as a libidinal collectivity came to exist in the intimate spaces of people's lives, and over the lengthy period of broadcast, these images became familiar, domesticated and comfortable. This was arguably a key symbolic backdrop against which the Ram Janmabhoomi movement can be seen to have *taken off*." [Rajagopal 1994:1662]

New Forms of Affiliation

According to Rajagopal [1999, 2000, 2001] the expansion of Doordarshan's programming and infrastructural reach cannot by itself explain the success of Ram as a pivotal symbol of Hindu identity (and of the Sangh Parivar at the centre-stage of India's politics). Indeed, this phenomenon is situated at the conjuncture of three contemporaneous events: expansion of communication, the reshaping of the political panorama and finally the spread of consumer goods market. If this unprecedented expansion of communication infrastructures and programming provided better communication and a nation-wide interpretative public [Mankekar 1999] and the shift in the political field allowed the emergence of a political language that drew increasingly on indigenous traditions, economic liberalisation and the expansion of the national market fostered the relationship between the logics of politics and electioneering and those of commercial advertising and profit [Rajagopal 2001].

Rajagopal's analysis of Hindu nationalism that focusses on political participation based on consumer choice, rather than ideological preference, contextualizes Sangh Parivar's brand identification with the serialised *Ramayan* and the symbol of Ram that contributed to the BJP's electoral success [Rajagopal 2000]. Rajagopal discusses the promotion of Ram and Hindutva carried out by Hindu nationalists through publicity images. Rajagopal's discourse of retailing Hindutva rests on the question of the split Indian public – split by division of language and caste. Thus, the retailing of Hindutva produced "discrete forms of Hindu affiliation via multiple modes of participation consumption, and so cutting across divides of class and caste" [Rajagopal 2001:26].

In order to broaden Hindutva's popularity, the Sangh Parivar's strategy focussed on changing forms of public affiliation along commodity logic creating a homology between consuming and voting behaviour, religious identity and political or electoral affiliation. Not religion alone, but marketing could keep the Hindu public/electorate compact. This the Hindu nationalists did by employing a more participatory language through the uses of symbols and images of religion that altered the modes and space of political participation [Rajagopal 2001:66]. These symbols

could be reproduced relatively cheaply in a variety of media and form. Thus, affiliation to the Hindu community involved acts of purchase (of stickers, replica of Ram's sandals, bricks, small pots of holy water, *bindi*, flags, scarves and shawls, coupons and buttons, audio and video cassettes) that were meant both for personal consumption but also for public display to signal membership to the Hindu community. While consumption of certain articles became a sign of belonging and an affirmation of a Hindu identity, Hindu religious practices became acts of national citizenship [Rajagopal 2001:67].

Promoting the symbolism of Ram is based on commodity consumption in advertisement. The manipulation of popular symbols redefined a familiar image of the idol. An equivalence is then created between the meanings and values of the image and those of the brand name (in this case Hindu identity) being promoted, while a reward is assessed for the effort of purchase [Rajagopal 1994:1663]. Accordingly, effective communication and propaganda (articulated in different registers [Rajagopal 2001]), television's influence as a facilitator and the emergence of a new visual regime, and the retailing of Hindutva, which allowed for the emergence of a compacted Hindu public, assured the success of the Ram symbol.

The Hindu right's political use of Ram since the 1980s has contributed to heighten the process of communalisation of politics. Ram's complex symbolism provided the Hindutva brotherhood with a captivating and winning set of representations for both the nation and Indian identity. The emergence of this phenomenon is difficult to explain. After all, the entire symbolic repertoire centred on the figure of Ram was hardly a novelty. As Pollock explains, the political potential of the *Ramayana* epic is intrinsic to the text, while *Ram Rajya* – as a utopia – was repeatedly utilized as a mobilising symbol during the nationalist movement. Moreover, a Ram-inspired party was already active in the 1950s and 1960s, and early XX century *mythological* films championed epic stories in cinematic media for nationalist purposes. Rajagopal accounts for this unprecedented success in the historical conjuncture of three independent events (political vacuum, expansion of communication technologies, and economic liberalisation), and in the intrinsic

characteristics of the serialised epic (Sagar's realist conventions, the epic's serialisation format, and television's power). While the first two aesthetic conventions gave the symbol "discursive detail and verisimilitude" [Rajagopal 2001:104], television – seen here as a *facilitator* rather than an "unmoved mover" [Rajagopal 2001:31] because it accelerated (rather than created) events already in motion – facilitated the emergence of a new visual regime and of a new public language resonating with themes of collective empowerment [Rajagopal 2001:32]. Broadcasting the *Ramayan* on state television effectively situated Hindu mythology in the realm of what was culturally considered 'national' and 'Indian'. Moreover, television established connections across a divided society [Rajagopal 1999:133], creating a nation-wide interpretative public [Mankekar 1999] and the 'institution of a visual regime right across social divides' [Rajagopal 1999:134]. The retailing of Hindutva suggests that consumerism affirmed political and national identity. [Rajagopal 2001:63]. The Sangh Parivar's intense programme of new public spectacles centred on Ram symbolism contributed enormously to the promotion of Hindutva revivalism, advocating the creation of a strong and definite sense of Hindu identity.

Concluding Remarks

It would be simplistic to explain Hindutva's success by pointing merely to their ability in the manipulation of the channels of communication, their introduction of new modes of affiliation through commodity logic or to the capillary diffusion of the Sangh Parivar on the Indian territory. On the contrary, the participatory character of Sangh Parivar mobilisation campaigns and the success of its symbolic repertoire can be attributed to the fact that the language used by the Sangh Parivar is familiar to a large number of the masses in India. Therefore, one can argue that Hindutva's success has more to do with the familiarity of the symbolic language employed by the Sangh Parivar than with the shrewd manipulation of mass media or of commodity logic. The cultural coding of Hindutva's vision for India is deeply rooted in India's traditions and is quintessentially Hindu. Images of the nation – as a bountiful, prosperous and successful country – are cradled in an essentially Hindu idiom. The Sangh Parivar's repertoire conjures up images and symbols, which evoke ancient, timeless, indigenous

Hindu practices. It is in their timelessness, indigenousness and familiarity that these practices become authentically Indian.

Indeed, the *modus operandi* of the Sangh Parivar consists in the monopoly and innovative use of familiar symbols. Hindutva forces have blended together "structural elements of the Hindu religious tradition with the fabric of social modernity confronted by the delocalising of practices and relocalising of references" [Assayag 1998:140-141]. In search for new orders of social connectivity [Rajagopal 2001] the Sangh Parivar has crafted a sophisticated, participatory language and a range of appeals through the use of the symbols and images of religion [Rajagopal 2001:57]. The use of an articulated language meant not only the invention of new symbols, public ceremonies and rituals as mode of participation to the Hindu community. – 'new invented rituals' [Bhattacharya 1991:130] – but also the diffusion of new versions of old myths and symbols promoting new icons. Public rituals organised by the Sangh Parivar passed from being a simple medium of communication, to becoming a symbolic affirmation of a Hindu public [Rajagopal 2001:61] and of Hindu superiority. As Figures 23 and 24 suggest it is the combination of traditional and familiar images and symbols with modern-day issues that makes the Sangh Parivar's symbolic idiom incontestable.

Fig. 23 Jay Vigyan

Figure 23 reproduced the logo used for publicising the 2003 Science and Technology Policy launched by the BJP-led government. This publicity poster was issued to commemorate India's 57th Year of Independence and "5 Golden Years of Science and Technology" in 2003. A crouching naked male holds a bow and arrow pointing to the symbol of nuclear power at the centre of which is reproduced the image of a cogwheel. The slogan *Jay Vijyan* is written on both sides of the nuclear symbol in Hindi and in English. Despite its marginality (this picture occupies a small space in the poster), I would argue that it is images like this one that exemplify Hindutva's political iconography. This logo is a synthesis of previous and contemporary iconographies and symbolism. It evokes familiar traditions: the crouched archer reminds one of Arjun, the archer par excellence of the *Mahabharat*. The slogan *Jay Vigyan* is instead reminiscent of the nationalist call *Jay Jawan Jay Kisan* (see note 48) thus evoking the spirit of nationalism and of patriotism. The nuclear symbol is homage to India's scientific developments and to the 1998 Pokhran nuclear explosions. The cogwheel is instead reminiscent of the iconography of the Nehruvian era (see Chapter 4). This nuclear Arjun[88] of the 21st century thus successfully blends together familiar (Hindu) cultural traditions, nationalism, patriotism, scientific development and Nehruvian iconography.

Similar techniques are at work in Fig. 24. The latter was part of the 'India Shining' campaign launched by the BJP-led NDA government at the end of its legislature in the run-up to the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. It meant to portray the achievements of the government and the successes of the Indian economy during the five years of BJP rule[89]. Despite its stark simplicity of composition, the poster reproduced here is exceptionally significant. Creating a parallel between nature and economic success by using the symbolism of flowers and by playing with meanings of the word 'blooming', the picture portrays an old man holding a bunch of lotuses. What

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[88] Hindu nationalists contend that ancient Hindus already possessed nuclear devices and point to a passage in the Bhagvad Gita in which god describes himself as "the radiance of a thousand suns" [cited in Nanda 2002:6] to support their statements [Bhatt 2001].

[89] The 'India Shining' campaign was criticised by the opposition parties for its wasteful use of public funds (roughly $US20 million) and – by featuring only the contented Indian middle-classes – of ignoring the vast majority of the population that still lived in poverty with no access to the most basic facilities.

I find particularly significant is not just the lotuses – here used as reminders and symbols of India's (Hindu) civilization, of the nation-state (the lotus is the national flower of India) and of the BJP all rolled into one – but also the composition itself which is reminiscent of the stereotypical portray of the happy farmer, a mainstay of Nehruvian iconography (see Chapter 4).

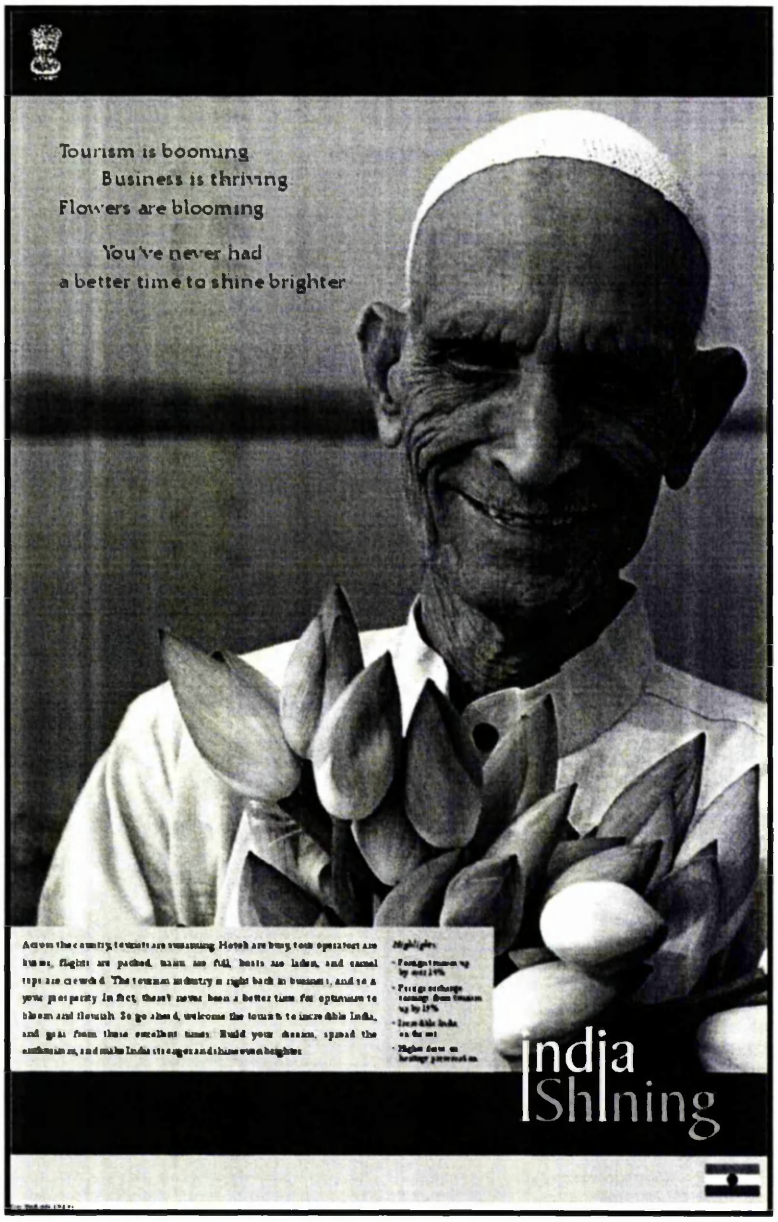

Fig. 24 India Shining Poster

Conclusions

This thesis has been about the (contested) ways, struggle, and competition of imagining the nation in India. I have argued that political symbols are fundamental instruments in this process of imagination. It is the construction of symbolic repertoires that allows for the imagination of the nation. These practices are on going as national identities are fluid and socially constructed, particularly in post-colonial contexts. In order to better understand this process of imagination of the nation, the study has examined symbolic repertoires belonging to three crucial historical periods in the life of the Indian nation: the pre-independence anti-colonial period, the Nehruvian years, and the contemporary period, focussing both on the continuities and changes in their symbolic repertoires. The objective of this thesis has been to show how a sense of national identity and belonging to a nation is called upon and activated, created and re-created in symbolic forms and ritual practices in India. This study then goes beyond questions of meaning and culture to interrogate the dynamics of nationality construction and performance as products of power and politics.

Through extensive original fieldwork, providing a comparative analysis of India's national symbolic repertoires in a historical perspective, this work is a contribution to the literature on nation-building in India. The conventional approach to the study of politics has meant that a large portion of this very wide literature has been largely ideological in character, and focussed on the story of ideas of the nation in India. Various works however have also turned their attention to the analysis of the iconography of nationalism in India (Partha Mittar and Guha Thakutar among others). This thesis is meant to be a contribution in this sense/to this.

Seeking to address a gap in the extensive literature on the subject, this work is also a contribution to the wider study of symbolic politics in India which has so far focussed on a singular moment of the life of the nation (be it a particular time in the life of colonial or post-colonial India) or on specific symbols (usually religious ones). In contrast, by recognising that the effectiveness of political symbols of the nation

emerges only when one takes into accounts symbolic repertoires in their entirety rather than single symbolic constructions, (the national flag, the map of India for example) this thesis hopes to contribute to the construction of a symbolic grammar and syntax of India's national identity.

The findings and emerging themes are also useful to the broader study of political symbolism. This area of scholarship is typically concerned with the study of first world political system or authoritarian regimes whose power is believed to rest mainly on both the threat of coercive force and also on very articulated propaganda structures. However, this thesis has shown how politics in general are symbolically constructed. Indeed, if politics refers to the distribution and management of power and therefore to the creation of hierarchies and relations of subordination, it is through symbolic forms that these relations are objectified, developed, maintained and expressed.

This thesis additionally has explored the emotional dimension of politics. The focus here has been on the role of the imagination in politics and on the struggle that takes place for the establishment of a political imagery. Thus, politics is not only about the control of the means of coercion but also about the management and monopoly of the means of imagination. According to a common view, the study of politics is understood as the analysis of government, political ideas, or the way power affects social relations. However, this conventional approach neglects the study of passions and emotions in politics. Political analysts have long struggled with passion as a political conundrum; yet one cannot fully understand politics without looking at its emotional aspect as a force that enthuses and arouses people. When acting in the political world, people are driven by emotions and not just by simple calculations of personal interests. It could be argued that in liberal democracies the strength of political power is deeply rooted in emotions as no power – regardless of its strength – could rely upon coercion alone. Through the analysis of some symbolic strategies (such as the use of dramaturgical techniques – repetitive actions, songs, costumes, stage – utilized in rituals to enhance emotions) this thesis argued that the affective dimension

of politics, the study of emotions and persuasion rather than crude force, are the primary means by which political consensus is built.

The thesis suggested that symbolic forms and actions transform political interests into moral obligations for action without constrains that rest beyond issues of rewards or threat of punishment. Through the study of the symbolic repertoires of the nationalist movement in India, this work has sought to show the moral and ritual obligations that are developed by institutions and organisations for the management and distribution of power – or in our case for the definition of national identity.

In these pages I have suggested that the nation emerges as a symbolic community. In this respect, symbols become crucial tools for visualising the nation and consequently they represent ideology. In recognition of such, this thesis has studied political symbols that have characterised three different periods in the life of the Indian nation. I have looked at symbols (visual and verbal) and rituals of the nation. The thesis suggested that one can evince that the symbolic structures that became more significant in this contest are the symbols of distinctiveness: symbols that emphasised the nation's uniqueness and exclusiveness. These were symbols that helped the nation to establish its boundaries by defining the shared values and characteristics of the in-group, thus fostering national integration.

The thesis focussed in particular on certain types of symbolic forms which favoured a visual and ritual aspect (Merriam's *miranda* of power) because it is in these symbolic forms that relations of power become more apparent. In particular, certain symbolic manifestations (forms and actions) were selected that were considered crucial for the articulation of notions of identity. Analytically the thesis focussed on the ways in which the nation – considered as a geopolitical body – and the national citizens were imagined in the three crucial phases of national development. By focussing on the official symbols of the nation (the national emblem, the national anthem, and the national flag) as well as other important symbolic formations (historic buildings, landmarks, postal stamps, currency, various insignia of national prestige and power,

legislations, education policies, public ceremonies and rites of integration and mobilisation) this work presented the symbolic repertoires produced and disseminated by the Indian ruling elites and how they forged a national consciousness and sentiment of national belonging.

In this thesis I have proposed that national identity can be viewed as a social construct where new constructions of the nation and of the national people are constantly emerging and being rearranged. In Chapter 2, I argued that dominant discourses during the nationalist anti-colonial movement articulated concepts of cultural and territorial unity, pan-Indianism, *swadeshi* (indigenousness), and integration. The symbolic repertoire that emerged was constituted by a familiar inventory of images and representations that rested on pre-colonial indigenous modes of expression and resistance and was steeped in dominant religious idioms. Unity was symbolised by the representation of natural borders and by resorting to images of India's sacred geography, while pan-Indianism was typified by elements of cultural syncretism and assimilation. Unity and integration were also symbolically enacted during the celebration of public rituals. *Swadeshi* was symbolised, among other things, through the choice of an indigenous lifestyle.

The pre-independence tradition that used the vocabulary and grammar of a popular idiom was eventually discarded with the coming of independence. A new national visual language, shorn of its religious iconographies – but also of its vitality – dominated India's post-colonial panorama. In Chapters 3 and 4 I argued that independence brought a series of radical changes to the symbolic articulations of the narratives of national identity. Thematically, the repertoire reflected the dominant ideology of post-independent India. Themes of modernisation, progress, industrialisation, reform, scientific advance, secularism, egalitarianism, and national self-reliance were all written in the visual narrative of independent India. Modern India became a landscape of techno-future where the visualisation of modernity was articulated through the rhetoric of development and images of dams, modern machinery and progress in general.

Similarly, the more recent period of Indian history has been characterised by the emergence of new constructions of the nation that drew on symbols of Indianness and the rhetoric of religious tradition in order to consolidate a new national identity. The Sangh Parivar proposes a form of cultural nationalism and it answers to questions of nation, nationhood and national identity by using symbols and symbolic constructions clearly derived from the Hindu heritage. Through the uses of a highly-emotionally charged and very effective language, Hindutva constructed a repertoire dominated by symbols of the past derived from the Hindu tradition.

Besides analysing symbolic constructions, an important portion of this thesis also focussed on the rich array of ceremonial activities that shaped and informed the political life in India. Arguing that the ritual performances are powerful fora where ideas develop, and where rules, symbols and discourses are contested, this thesis discussed the values and beliefs underpinning constructions of national identity in a rapidly changing and complex society. The ambiguous metaphorical language of the rituals was examined, revealing how nationalist ideologies were constructed and reproduced, but also challenged and appropriated.

The principal conclusion of this work is that questions of national identity are fluid and constantly renegotiated. Nation-building is thus a historically-grounded creative process, particularly in contexts like the Indian one where questions of national identity are still contentious. By employing constructivist theories of nationalism this thesis argued in favour of a process of construction of national identity emphasising the role of creative agents for the management and reproduction of symbolic repertoires. In this process, these signifying agents both select cultural elements drawing upon pre-existing cultural resources and partly fabricate others.

The thesis also focussed on the strategies of dissemination of these symbolic repertoires, because it is through the analysis of these practices that symbolic inventories become most apparent. The aim was also to show how these strategies are

crucial for enhancing the public's perception and understanding of the symbolic vocabulary and grammar of nationhood. At different times, distinct strategies of dissemination were used. Chapter 2 showed how, during the anti-colonial movement, pre-existing forms of resistance to authority that revolved around the principle of civil disobedience were widely used to mobilise a wide section of the population even before Gandhi's *satyagrahas*. In the post-independence years (Chapter 3 and 4), mass media were at the service of the nationalist cause, as it was demonstrated by the central role played by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and its media branches in the process of 'nationalisation of the masses'. In most recent times (Chapter 5 and 6), the Sangh Parivar demonstrated particular adeptness at utilising the performative aspects of India's traditional culture to showcase its vision of modern India. Political rituals such as the multilayered ceremonies of the Sangh Parivar's *yatras* are extant example of this practice. In this regard, an important distinction could be made between institutional and oppositional discourses of the nation. In the first case, symbolism and strategies of dissemination are mainly used to indoctrinate the public and promote a particular form of identity and specific national values. In oppositional discourses, however, there is usually a shift away from using symbolism as a mechanism of indoctrination and identity formation and toward a more explicit attempt at using it as vehicle to generate and boost legitimacy of the new order.

Mapping the changing character of Indian national identity through the study of political symbolism also reveals not just of the changes but also of the continuities and similarities across time and symbolic repertoires. Indeed, this approach, coupled with a historical comparative perspective, shows how, rather than being created *ex novo*, symbolic repertoires – particularly visual ones – have built upon previous imaginations of the nation, both iconographically and thematically. This thesis has also attempted to show that classical typologies of ethnic and civic nationalisms seem not to be applicable to the Indian case as – from an analysis of the political language and rhetoric of India's nationalist discourses – it emerges that at different times, the discursive logic of the pre-colonial, Nehruvian and Hindutva ideologies employed different symbolic codes to express national identity. In the instances considered,

primordial, civic and cultural codes [Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995] were used and the symbolic idioms that emerged were testimony of the dialectic tensions emerging from the simultaneous usage of these codes. This is particularly significant with regards to the Nehruvian and Hindutva's nationalist discourses, which in general have been represented as being exclusively couched in civic (the former) and in ethnic (the latter) notions of nationalism.

Drawing on Turner's [1967] contribution to the study of ritual symbols, the thesis showed that, due to a symbol's multivocality, it is precisely the use of symbols that help to consolidate and create unity in absence of consensus. This does not necessarily means that politics is or must be understood as irrational and that people are at the mercy of their emotions when thinking or acting politically. Emotions do, however, play an important party in our political behaviour and orientation, and it is not entirely true that peoples allow themselves to be moved by considerations of self-interest only.

This work also shows that on the whole a highly emotive symbolic language that uses high-order symbols couched in primordial codes (drawing upon symbols of blood and kinship) is stronger than other languages employing a different array of symbols of belonging. This work however does not suggest that national identities are fixed and primordial. Although the strength and resilience of some symbolic construction of the nation might seem to indicate otherwise, one must bear in mind that the Indian nation is a wholly modern phenomenon. Those traditions that are mobilised by some symbolic repertoires are in fact partly re-invented and there is nothing primordial about them. Indeed it is the adaptability and fluidity of traditions, rather than their rigidity, that make them valuable resources for the construction of collective identity in the contemporary world.

Here the distinction between higher-order and lower-order symbols has been particularly useful for an understanding of India's national symbolic repertoires. Elder and Cobb [1983] distinguish between what they call higher order symbols and lower

order ones, also called situational symbols. The former pertain to the political regime and/or its political community; the latter usually relate to current authorities, non-governmental political actors, policies and issues. The two authors suggest that higher order symbols tend to be more inclusive, more durable, and have a stronger affective attachment than those situational symbols that are related to current policies and political actors and that, therefore, tend to be more transient and exclusive. This distinction was particularly useful when comparing the nationalist symbolic repertoires of the three periods in question to study the dynamics of formation of symbolic repertoires. By employing this category I was in fact able to describe not just the higher emotive significance and durability of certain symbolic constructs (crucial for fostering feelings of group cohesion and mutuality), but also to shed light on the important process of rearrangement of India's symbolic practices over time. In fact, although nation building requires a new vocabulary, often the latter, rather than creating a symbolic repertoire ex-novo, actually selects, adapts and reorganizes older representations. This has been true of all the symbolic repertoires analysed here. In fact, changes in the relationship of power are often effected by means of symbolic continuity and not by the creation and implementation of new symbolic forms. In particular, the distinction between higher-order symbols and situational ones (and the possibility of symbols to change their status at any given time) has been especially useful in understanding the Sangh Parivar's unique symbolic strategies of nation-building (Chapter 5 and 6). It was noted that the Sangh Parivar – despite its ideological standing that is partly inconsistent with the previous symbolic order – has not tried to radically change the symbols of nationhood. Rather, it has sought to appropriate pre-existing higher-order symbols by attaching to them fresh meanings consistent with their ideology, while at the same time, elevating situational symbols related to polices and personalities to higher-order ones.

The emphasis throughout this thesis has been on the ways in which nationhood and a sense of national identity arise from the 'rearrangements' of these symbolic practices. Because nations are not givens but historical products whose concepts of nation and national identity are constantly renegotiated, the reorganisation of symbolic

practices is a recurrent phenomenon in the life of a nation. By focussing on three distinct moments of the life of the Indian nation – anti-colonial struggle, immediate post-independence and the contemporary moment – the thesis showed how through the analysis of symbolic representational practices undertaken to defining the meaning of India and of Indianness, the latter had changed over time. This phenomenon also offers an important insight into the changing aspirations of the elites and of their political objectives. Symbols used to define the borders of the political community have changed over time and not only "depending upon the elites who have done the defining" like Brass [1979:53] argued, but also because of the changed context in which the defining has taken place.

These symbolic systems are often renegotiated at times of crisis. The historical and structural constraints of every period within which ideological movements struggle for dominance are very important for the triumph of one ideology over another and the establishment of one particular symbolic repertoire rather than another. The three periods chosen can be defined as moments of crisis – periods of strong and radical social transformation when old ways of viewing the world and of organising life were no longer valid. These are periods of ideological activism when competing ways and strategies develop and compete for dominance. It is in situations like these that symbolic activity is at its highest, and culture – seen here as a toolkit or repertoire from which political actors can select – is mobilised.

Thus, Chapter 2 argued that it was the change of mobilisation techniques and the inclusion of the masses in the movement that brought a change in the articulation of ideas of the nation and of national identity and were responsible for an indigenisation of the nationalist idiom. Chapter 3 showed that it was Nehru's acquisition of the levers of power that fortuitously made Nehruism the winning ideology, rather than an ideological victory because there did not exist broad consensus over his idea of India. On the contrary, at the time of independence there existed diverging visions of India. Given that power relations determine the creation of national symbolic repertoires and symbols are direct reflections of dominant

ideological formation, I argued that Nehru became the signifying agent who selected and articulated India's cultural elements that defined the national identity. The conjuncture of the dynamics of partition and the extreme communal violence that ensued, along with Patel's sudden death and the general consensus that the government had a primary responsibility for the modernisation of the country, created the conditions for Nehru's ideology to triumph. These outcomes, in turn, made the state the only agent with the means and resources to implement a national vision.

Similarly, Chapters 5 and 6 argued that there is considerable evidence to suggest that the interplay of political and economic circumstances combined with elements of ascribed identity were crucial for the emergence and the establishment of a Hindu/Indian identity. The demise of Nehruism created the ideological space for the expression of a political identity, while economic liberalisation opened up possibilities – particularly for India's emerging middle-classes – to gain economically from this new condition. Moreover, there the new economic policies of globalisation and liberalisation contributed to the rise of Hindutva forces. Economic liberalisation produced increasing economic dissatisfaction on the one hand and growing unemployment on the other.

The foregoing analysis addressed issues at the heart of research on national identity. The comparative historical approach shows that collective identities are constantly challenged by competing definitions of identity that are articulated in symbolic forms. The analysis adds to our understanding of national identity formation by showing how key symbols and symbolic formations are created, managed and disseminated to allow the imagination of the Indian nation.

For symbolic politics, a number of issues remain for future research. Throughout this thesis the emergence of competing visions for India has been linked to changes in the social, political and economic panorama. As Indian politics enters a new phase where neither of India's two dominant parties have any definite ascendancy, it will be interesting to see how this political shift, along with the impact of economic

liberalisation and globalisation, and the emergence of new classes will influence the symbolic repertoire of the Indian nation in the near future. Indeed, one of the thesis's underlining distinctions has been between political symbolism of the nation and political symbolism of distinct parties. The thesis showed how, during the Nehruvian period, it seemed that there was coincidence between the political symbolism of the nation and symbolic repertoire of the dominant party, the Congress. Later, with the emergence of the Sangh Parivar and the establishment of the Hindutva ideology, it appeared for a time that the national symbolic repertoire was becoming identical to the BJP's vision of national identity. Thus, now that the political panorama has again changed and a new coalition of parties is at the power in Delhi, a question that remains is whether and how the symbolic repertoire of the nation will change. Within this context, further study of symbolic politics of national identity must also take into consideration the construction of representations of the nation beyond dominant discourses. The study of the emergence of new constructions of the national disseminated not by the national elites but by contesting political agents from below will shed light onto interesting articulations of identity and onto the dialectical relationship between dominant discourses and those of the challenging groups.

The understanding of the question of symbolic politics of national identity in India will also be advanced through the analysis of the role of religion in contemporary nationalism in India. Religion has always been an important element for the definition of national identity in India. While for Nehru and the secularists, religion was a secondary symbol of Indianness, in the contemporary moment and – to a lesser extent – during the anti-colonial movement, religion has been an important symbol of belonging. Indeed, identity politics based on the articulation of primordial attachments is a characteristic of contemporary India. Indeed practices of modernity in post-colonial times in India have paradoxically 'primordialised' religion in confirming its constitutive role as a fundamental component of Indian identity. Therefore, despite the drive for secularisation of India's society, religion has remained an important marker of identity.

Although much work clearly remains to be done in this field, this analysis has begun to sketch the broad contours of this intriguingly complex topic. Because national identity is still a contentious issue in India, understanding the dynamics of national identity formation through a symbolic and constructivist approach is not just an intriguing theoretical issue but one of immense practical significance as well.

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